THE Hudson REVIEW

OCTAVIO PAZ:
Presence and the Present

JOYCE CAROL OATES:
Unmailed, Unwritten Letters—a story

CALVIN BEDIENT:
Middlemarch: Touching Down

DAVID PAUL FUNT:
Newer Criticism and Revolution

ROBERT MARTIN ADAMS:
Weimar Elegies

Poems by JOHN HAINES, JOHN FREDERICK NIMS, W. S. MERWIN, HAROLD WITT.

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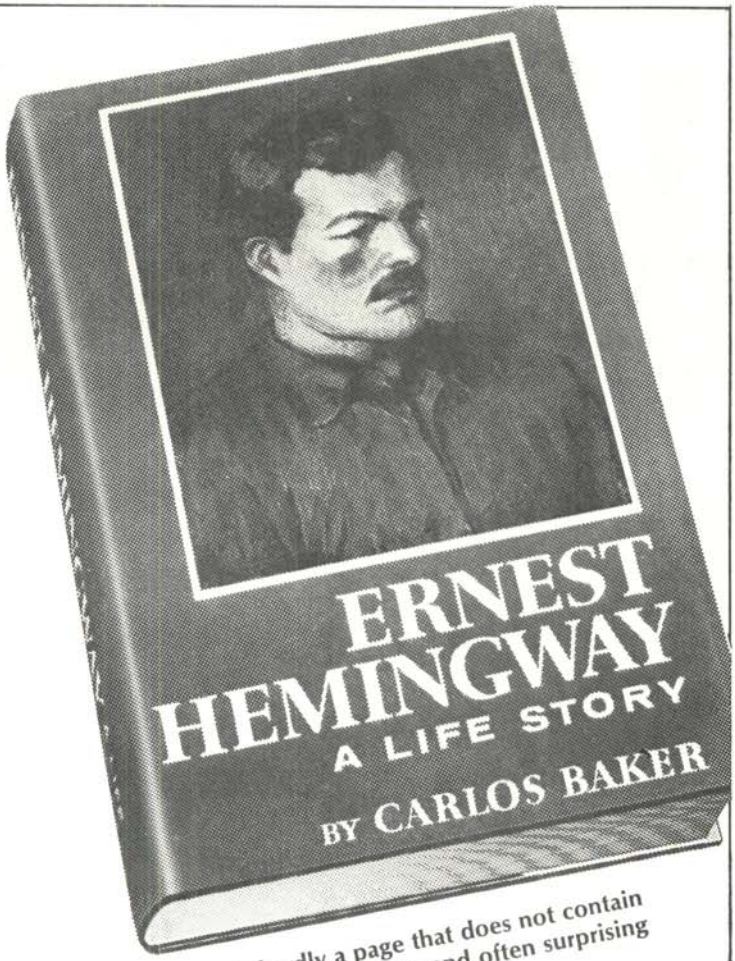

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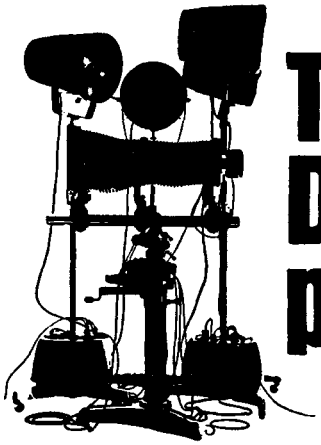

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THE HUDSON REVIEW is published quarterly by The Hudson Review, Inc., 65 East 55th Street, New York, N. Y. 10022. It is a member of The Council of Literary Magazines and is indexed in the Social Sciences and Humanities Index.

Subscription $5.00 per year in U. S.; foreign including Canada $5.50. Single copy $1.50. U. S. distributor: B. De Boer, 188 High Street, Nutley, N. J. 07110. Subscriptions in England: B. H. Blackwell, Ltd., The Broad Street, Oxford. Back issues and reprints of Volumes I—XIX available from AMS Press, Inc., 56 East 13th Street, New York, N. Y. 10003. Microfilms of Volumes I-XIX available from University Microfilms, Inc., 300 N. Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, Mich. 48106.

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Printed in the United States of America. Printing office: 2901 Byrdhill Road, Richmond, Virginia 23205. Second Class postage paid at Richmond, Virginia.

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VOLUME XXII
NUMBER 1
SPRING 1969

THE Hudson Review

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Reports

Kawabata

A JAPANESE HAS AT LAST received the Nobel Prize in literature. The event has been a source of great delight to the Japanese, but it has also puzzled them. Neither the delight nor the puzzlement is difficult to understand. The Japanese have been culturally on the defensive this last century, sometimes giving way to a blind adulation of things Western, sometimes over-compensating with a nationalism that smacks of protesting too much; and now a very Japanese kind of writer has been given the most revered of international awards, to demonstrate that there was something there. But from precisely this fact arise doubts. Why should the Westerners, a prosy, unpoetic breed with an over-developed rational faculty, have chosen to honor the most intuitively poetic of Japanese writers? Do the foreigners really understand? It is a question the whole country has been asking. According to newspaper accounts, His Imperial Majesty asked it of Yasunari Kawabata himself.

There is no way to answer it, really. Not a great deal of Kawabata's writing has been translated, and he had not, until the Nobel award, attracted much attention in the West. There is some evidence that the gentlemen of the Swedish Academy, who name the laureate, had a rather prettified notion of the Japanese tradition and Kawabata's relation to it, as if a corrosive substance known as Americanization were eating into the stones and mosses of an old garden. It is perfectly valid to argue, moreover, that read in translation Kawabata is only half read. He makes brilliant use of the evasiveness of the Japanese language, and something changes by virtue of the fact, let us say, that a relative pronoun must be introduced into an English sentence when the Japanese original contains none. There is a collection of Kawabata short stories with a title that might mean either *People Who Love* or *People Whom I Love*. The translator into English must make a choice, although some such contortion as *Love People* might possibly convey a little of the ambiguity of the original.

Kawabata's literary origins are generally held to be Western. He came into prominence in the twenties, a member of a group that was much aware of such European literary movements as surrealism and dadaism. One can aver a European influence in the sudden transitions, the eccentric imagery, the fragmentation, and the mixing of the senses that are so important in Kawabata's writing. Sometimes it is impossible to deny, Kawabata himself having admitted outright imitation of such writers as James Joyce. Immediately after having made the admission, however, he said, in a 1934 essay: "Among the great Western realists, there have been some who, approaching death after great trials and agonies, have finally caught sight of the distant East. I, per-

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haps, can play there, a children's song in my heart." When he is at his best, his peculiarities are more Japanese than surrealist.

Kawabata's novels tend to take very long in the writing, and the list of unfinished novels is impressive. The word "unfinished," however, is somewhat misleading, because almost any one of them could go on longer, or could stop almost anywhere along its way. They are highly episodic and fragmented, a stringing together of little lyrical vignettes, to indefinite length. Kawabata has said that a scene or a face, perhaps that of a fellow passenger on a train, will attract his attention, and he will invent an episode to accommodate it; and that episode may or may not give rise to other episodes. He seldom has much notion at the outset of where he is going. Sometimes, as in *Snow Country,* probably his best known novel in the West, a short story becomes a collection of related stories, and, in the course of a decade or more, a novel—but a novel without a clear beginning, middle, and end. If the form, or want of it, may seem strange to those reared in the Aristotelian tradition, it has venerable forebears in Japan. *The Tale of Genji,* greatest of the Japanese classics, tends to be episodic and lacks a neat plot, and no one can be sure—perhaps the writer herself was not—whether or not it is finished. But one is reminded still more of a uniquely Japanese form, *renga* linked verse, a subtle and complex kind of verse-capping. Each verse is linked to but not circumscribed by its neighbor or neighbors, and the shape of the sequence as a whole is rather more like a string of beads than a well-wrought urn.

Kawabata's obsessive theme is loneliness and the impossibility of love. It is frequently said, no doubt correctly, that the facts of his childhood account for the sadness of his world. He was orphaned in infancy, and lost his grandparents and his only sister not long afterwards. His heroes and heroines spend a great deal of time making love, and yet love does not come to them. The eroticism is chilly, somehow they never possess each other. In both *Snow Country* and *Thousand Cranes,* the other major Kawabata work available in English, the heroes, away from women they have made love to, have only tactile memories of them, and the reduction to the tactile has the effect of robbing them of their humanity. In a recent Kawabata work called *House of the Sleeping Beauties,* the dehumanization of love is pushed as far as it can go: impotent old men spend nights in the company of girls who have been drugged into sleep. This, the novelist Yukio Mishima has said, is "the sort of thing the Papacy hates worst, sexual desire that is the remotest from love."

If Kawabata's world at first sight seems a bleak, empty, forbidding one, the little flickers of beauty that go to make up one of his successful characters, the geisha Komako in *Snow Country,* for instance, tell one that matters are not quite so simple. The sadness and the emptiness come to seem less like desert regions which repel than like oases which summon. In a sad little 1947 essay (the defeat intensified the

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Kawabata sadness), Kawabata said: "The pathos of *The Tale of Genji* [is] softened by a Japanese kind of consolation and succor. . . . I have never experienced pains and sorrows of the Western kind. I have not once seen in Japan emptiness and decay of the Western kind." He repeated very much the same thing in his Nobel address. He has said that he thinks the Buddhist scriptures the greatest of the world's literature, and no doubt Buddhism lies at the heart of the quest for nothingness, for extinction, that is implicit in so much of his writing and receives its clearest statement, perhaps, in *House of the Sleeping Beauties.* It is not an intellectual kind of Buddhism but an intuitive, aesthetic Buddhism. A want of interest in moral and metaphysical problems is among Kawabata's most striking characteristics.

The gentlemen of the Swedish Academy seem to have overlooked the fact that not all is beauty in the Kawabata world. Particularly in his post-war writings, a certain morbid quality is to be noted, a fascination with decline and decay that has been likened to necrophilia. When it is absent, as in the novel that has been translated into German as *Kyoto,* he approaches dangerously near the borders of sentimentality. The morbidness too has a venerable Japanese ancestry, and reminds us that Kawabata is a traditionalist of a complicated sort.

Much of what has been said may make Kawabata seem very remote, a relic of another age. There can be no doubt that he is a difficult and aloof writer, who makes no compromises to attract a mass audience; but he is also a very modern writer, and a writer whose themes are universal. The sadness may be an ancient Oriental kind of sadness, but, if they listen carefully enough, it speaks to the lonely, disaffected youth of both hemispheres. Even the formlessness has something modern about it—for does not a "happening" amount to a search for something of the sort?

The ability of this remarkable writer to be at once traditional and modern is nowhere more apparent than in his characterization. For very close to a thousand years, down to the late nineteenth century, the Japanese were not much interested in characterization. Then, suddenly, it became the very essence of the modern. A character like Komako in *Snow Country* is depicted in a manner so sparse and frugal that she constantly seems on the point of fading away into the background, a wraith-like straggler from an old romance; and yet she lingers on in the memory with a strange tenacity. Few modern Japanese writers have Kawabata's knack for bringing a character to life with a minimum of detail. For this reason if for no other, it is quite improper to scoff at the Swedish Academy—and there are those who have done so, in Japan and elsewhere—as a fossil making an award to a fossil. Kawabata's greatness is that he manages to be both of his time and of his tradition. Whether or not they entirely understood the writer they were honoring, the gentlemen of the Academy could not have made a better choice.

—EDWARD SEIDENSTICKER

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Paris Letter

THE "STUDENTS AND WORKERS MOVEMENT" or "cultural revolution" of May 1968 attracted many former surrealists of ripe middle age who until then had felt a similar excitement only at cultural meetings in Cuba, without expecting to find the Havana atmosphere so soon in the Latin Quarter itself. However one judges the long range importance of the May events, they were indeed a spontaneous response to many pressures. Even the less lovable aspects had a certain inevitability; and at the same time they seemed rather like a "fête" in contrast to the drabness of every day routine. The only truly unpleasant feature, to my mind, was the uncritical delectation of older intellectuals who fawned on the young rebels and took pleasure in imitating them without having anything to contribute toward a solution of their problems. Thus the new revolutionary Writers' Association which was formed inside the "occupied" and besieged Société des Gens de Lettres in the Hôtel Massa began playing communist and anarchist, with M. Phillippe Sollers of the review *Tel quel* as a new St. Just, intolerant of any criticism of the Party, while the majority engaged in a "permanent libertarian revolution." At that time, even the serious *Quinzaine littéraire* pledged itself to be the organ of *"la contestation"* and of class struggle in literature—a purpose which, however, soon fell into oblivion.

On the whole, the deeds of May were often more original than the words. Many of the graffiti that have been collected in various art books are quotes from the masters—Rimbaud being more of an inspiration than Marcuse, who found his French readers later. The surrealist past was blended with a "Pop art" style; accounts of those events have been published by Pauvert as comic strips.

It has been said that in May the structuralist fad died and Sartre's existentialism came back to life. Did not the new revolutionary action conform to Sartre's *Critique de la raison dialectique*? In truth, the one work of Jean-Paul Sartre which could have been relevant remained neglected. I refer to his play *Les Mains sales*. Here we meet a young ultraleft revolutionary of bourgeois origin in conflict with a veteran communist leader, who understands the need for temporary compromises with the enemy. Daniel Cohn-Bendit shouting insults at "Stalinist scum" and the C.G.T. secretary Séguy were opposed in precisely this way. Sartre, as playwright, knew that each character was right in his way and precisely this made the drama. Sartre, the generous *écrivain engagé*, accused the communists of being "traitors to the revolution." But were the communists obliged to sustain a revolution which they felt to be alien to their own world and whose success they doubted anyhow? Even in countries where the communists were not available to keep the workers and the students apart, the

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"...listen: there's a hell of a good universe next door; let's go."

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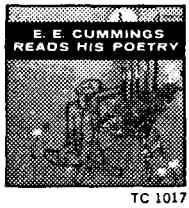

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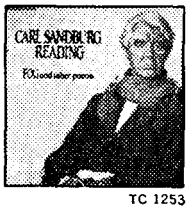

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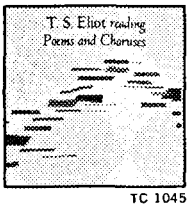

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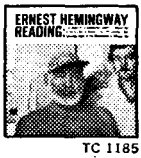

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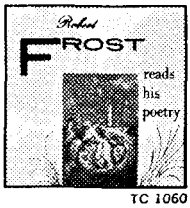

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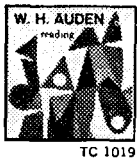

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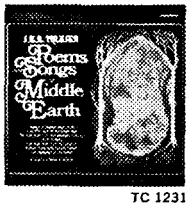

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difference between enemies of the *"société de consommation"* and workers wanting more share in it has asserted itself.

Neither Marcuse nor Sartre has been the prophet of this particular revolution. I see rather the moviemaker Jean-Luc Godard in this role. At least he has been its faithful reporter—in anticipation. The craze for quotes as a replacement for the thought process has been an irritating and even boring feature of Godard's movies for a long time. He has expressed the fear of a dehumanizing technocracy *(Alphaville),* he has shown the new eroticism of youth *(Masculin féminin),* and the new radicalism of students *(La Chinoise).* The criminal fringe of young workers who left their suburbs and moved into the Boul' Mich (in May they became the feared "Katangists" occupying the Sorbonne) came right out of Godard's *Bande à part.* Finally, the hatred of automobile civilization, the great pleasure taken in burning cars, the emergence of a hippie subculture were all to be seen in the frightening movie *Weekend,* which Professor Raymond Aron condemned at its first showing in Monte Carlo with as much vigor as he mustered later against the "May revolution." If it is the mark of genius to foresee the shape of things to come—"to lend one's ear to the wind of the future" as Baudelaire wrote—Godard would appear to be the genius of the May events. No graffiti has better expressed the climate of those days than Godard's "We are the children of Karl Marx and Coca Cola." I don't really mean that Godard is a genius, since most of his movies are marked by extreme self-indulgence. He happened to have accurate premonitions of the events of May; he had absorbed the climate of thought and emotion which had been prevalent in the underground, but which serious people had ignored, and he expressed it before the majority was aware of what was going on. Just as Godard's movies are largely on the subject of moviemaking itself and its new consciousness, the May events were a medium-oriented happening, more "McLuhanist" than marxist—despite the abstinence of the French TV.

There was an element of make-believe: battles at the barricades—with no one killed—were a mere reminiscence of the truly bloody barricades of the troubled nineteenth century. The writers played at imitating the imitation. Michel Butor, who had led the occupation of the Hôtel Massa, explained: "We wanted above all to repeat within the literary microcosm the actions of the students and workers. It had a symbolic meaning." The symbolic repetition of actions which have a practical use in other contexts (as in the occupation of factories) is more likely to result in self-satisfaction than in real help in the struggle.

To date, the May events have given rise to about two hundred books, mostly "instant literature," enthusiastic or—rarely—polemical. Few of the authors seem to have looked farther than Paris. Important events took place in Lyon, in Bordeaux, all around, yet the

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feeling remains strong that this movement has been somewhat more Parisian than national. Some older intellectuals seem to have been motivated by guilt feelings. "I belong to a generation which failed," moans Max Pol Fouchet. Sartre wrote the same thing years ago, and so did Léon Blum before him. I wonder whether Flaubert would not have found this "failure of a generation" topic appropriate for his *Dictionnaire des idees reçues.* In any case, the author of the *Education sentimentale* must be the most quoted writer of 1968 on the subject of intellectuals in a revolution.

One of the victims of the events was Jean-Louis Barrault, dismissed by André Malraux as director of the Théâtre de France, which was forcibly occupied by the *"contestataires."* "Barrault is dead!" he shouted at the time. However, he has neither died nor faded away, but is resurrected at the Elysée-Montmartre, with his own version of *Gargantua et Pantagruel*—inspired by a student production of *Les Guerres picrocholines.* Barrault has tried to add significance to the great enjoyable Renaissance novel by graphic reference to Jarry, Kafka and others; yet his production is vaguely reminiscent of *Hair,* with jerking, psychedelic effects and music by the popular young songwriter Polnarev (who used to be a student of mathematics). His *Rabelais,* despite the declared intentions, is less a testimonial to troubled times, crumbling institutions and new thoughts than a merry-go-round performed with gusto, highly pleasing to those same youngsters who had so unceremoniously ushered Barrault out of the Odéon. It is much the best production so far of this rather barren theater season.

The Argentinian Jorge Lavelli jumped to fame six years ago, winning a competition by his staging of Witold Gombrowicz' *The Wedding.* Now, in the rebuilt Théâtre de la Ville de Paris (formerly Théâtre Sarah Bernhardt), Lavelli has staged *Much Ado About Nothing.* Shakespeare, according to his interpretation, intended to pour scorn on young aristocrats who are out for profitable marriages and for spoiling other people's fun. They are only *"consommateurs de luxe."* At the end, dancing to discordant strains, they slowly sink into an abyss—like Don Giovanni—beneath the triumphant shouts of the people of Messina who suddenly crowd onstage and remain as victors in this episode of class struggle. T. S. Eliot has written that since we can probably never be right about anyone as great as Shakespeare, we should at least from time to time change our ways of being wrong. Lavelli has taken this advice to heart, it seems.

Marguerite Duras, one of the founders of the new Writers' Association (what has become of it?) has waged her class struggle in a different way. She has written still another play about the *Les Viaduc de la Seine-et-Oise* from which a woman threw the body of her husband piece by piece on to passing trains—she was located by a study of the time-table. In Duras' play *L'Amante anglaise* this woman kills and

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disposes of a deaf and dumb cousin while the husband pretends to ignore the whole thing. In the *"petite salle"* of the T.N.P., this was a good occasion for a star performance by Madeleine Renaud—although a less interesting one than her major role in Beckett's *Ah, les beaux jours!* Marguerite Duras has declared that she has "transposed" this crime from a proletarian to a bourgeois milieu—the husband actually wants to become a deputy—because such a sordid affair is "typically petit bourgeois." It is strange that an author whose dialogue shows such a good ear for clichés should fall into them so easily herself.

This letter, alas, has no mention of literature. The fact is that no great novels have appeared, no new names come to the fore. The correspondence of Gide and Martin du Gard, the diaries of Paul Claudel, of Charles Vildrac (readable and moving) and of the late Roger Vaillant (superficially exciting but essentially dull) have no competition from the story-tellers. *"L'imagination au pouvoir"* was the slogan of May. In literature it seems to be: *"Le document humain au pouvoir."* Since everyday life is drab once again, there is no longer any reason (if there ever was) for writers to entrust to "activists" the privileges of the imagination.

—FRANÇOIS BONDY

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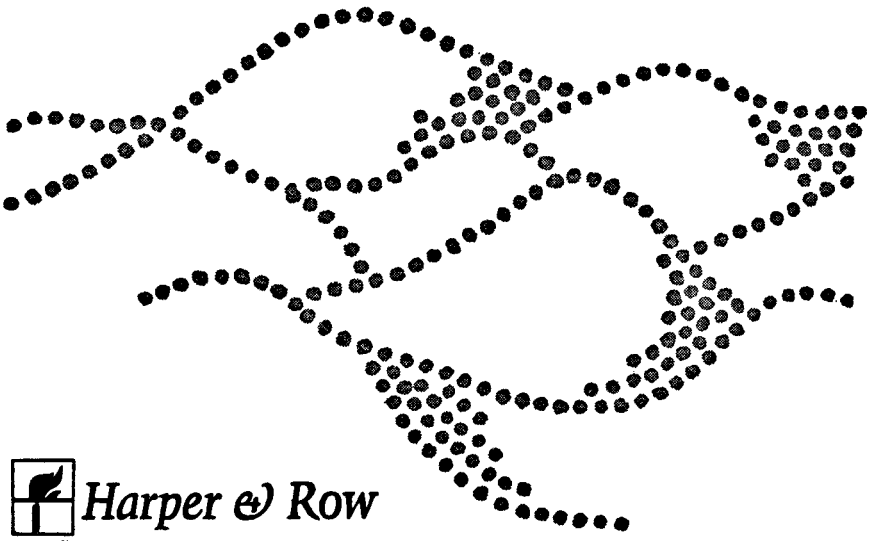

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JOYCE CAROL OATES

Unmailed, Unwritten Letters

Dear Mother and Father,

The weather is lovely here. It rained yesterday. Today the sky is blue. The trees are changing colors, it is October 20, I have got to buy some new clothes sometime soon, we've changed dentists, doctors, everything is lovely here and I hope the same with you. Greg is working hard as usual. The doctor we took Father to see, that time he hurt his back visiting here, has died and so we must change doctors. Dentists also. I want to change dentists because I can't stand to go back to the same dentist anymore. He is too much of a fixed point, a reference point. It is such a chore, changing doctors and dentists.

Why are you so far away in the Southwest? Is there something about the Southwest that lures old people? Do they see images there, shapes in the desert? Holy shapes? Why are you not closer to me, or farther away? In an emergency it would take hours or days for you to get to me. I think of the two of you in the Southwest, I see the highways going off into space and wonder at your courage, so late in life, to take on space. Father had all he could do to manage that big house of yours, and the lawn. Even with workers to help him it was terrifying, all that space, because he owned it. Maybe that was why it terrified him, because he owned it. Out in the Southwest I assume that no one owns anything. Do people even live there? Some people live there, I know. But I think of the Southwest as an optical illusion, sunshine and sand and a mountainous (mountainous?) horizon, with highways perfectly divided by their white center lines, leading off to Mars or the moon, unhurried. And there are animals, the designs of animals, mashed into the highways! The shape of a dog, a dog's pelty shadow, mashed into the hot, hot road—in mid-flight, so to speak, mid-leap, run over again and again by big trucks and retired people seeing America. That vastness would terrify me. I think of you and I think of protoplasm being drawn off into space, out there, out in the West, with no human limits to keep it safe.

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Dear Marsha Katz,

Thank you for the flowers, white flowers, but why that delicate hint of death, all that fragrance wasted on someone like myself who is certain to go on living? Why are you pursuing me? Why in secrecy? (I see all the letters you write to your father, don't forget; and you never mention me in them.) Even if your father were my lover, which is not true and cannot be verified, why should you pursue me? Why did you sign the card with the flowers *Trixie?* I don't know anyone named Trixie! How could I know anyone named Trixie? It is a dog's name, a high school cheerleader's name, an aunt's name . . . why do you play these games, why do you pursue me?

Only ten years old, and too young for evil thoughts—do you look in your precocious heart and see only grit, the remains of things, a crippled shadow of a child? Do you see in all this the defeat of your Daughterliness? Do you understand that a Daughter, like a Mistress, must be feminine or all is lost, must keep up the struggle with the demonic touch of matter-of-fact irony that loses us all our men . . . ? I think you have lost, yes. A ten-year-old cannot compete with a thirty-year-old. Send me all the flowers you want. I pick them apart one by one, getting bits of petals under my fingernails, I throw them out before my husband gets home.

Nor did I eat that box of candies you sent. Signed "Uncle Bumble"!

Are you beginning to feel terror at having lost? Your father and I are not lovers, we hardly see each other any more, since last Wednesday and today is Monday, still you've lost because I gather he plans on continuing the divorce proceedings, long distance, and what exactly can a child do about that . . . ? I see all the letters you write him. No secrets. Your Cape Cod sequence was especially charming. I like what you did with that kitten, the kitten that is found dead on the beach! Ah, you clever little girl, even with your I.Q. of uncharted heights, you couldn't quite conceal from your father and me your attempt to make him think 1) the kitten suggests a little girl, namely you 2) its death suggests your pending, possible death, if Father does not return. Ah, how we laughed over that! . . . Well, no, we didn't laugh, he did not laugh, perhaps he did not even understand the trick you were

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playing . . . your father can be a careless, abrupt man, but things stick in his mind, you know that and so you write of a little white kitten, alive one day and dead the next, so you send me flowers for a funeral parlor, you keep me in your thoughts constantly so that I can feel a tug all the way here in Detroit, all the way from Boston, and I hate it, I hate that invisible pulling, tugging, that witch's touch of yours. . . .

*

Dear Greg,

We met about this time years ago. It makes me dizzy, it frightens me, to think of that meeting. Did so much happen, and yet nothing? Miscarriages, three or four, one loses count, and eight or nine sweet bumbling years—why do I use the word *bumbling*, it isn't a word I would ever use—and yet there is nothing there, if I go to your closet and open the door your clothes tell me as much as you do. You are a good man. A faithful husband. A subdued and excellent husband. The way you handled my parents alone would show how good you are, how excellent. . . . My friend X, the one with the daughter said to be a genius and the wife no one has ever seen, X couldn't handle my parents, couldn't put up with my father's talk about principles, the Principles of an Orderly Universe, which he sincerely believes in though he is an intelligent man. . . . X couldn't handle anything, anyone. He loses patience. He is vulgar. He watches himself swerve out of control but can't stop. Once, returning to his car, we found a ticket on the windshield. He snatched it and tore it up, very angry, and then when he saw my surprise he thought to make a joke of it—pretending to be tearing it with his teeth, a joke. And he is weak, angry men are weak. He lets me close doors on him. His face seems to crack, with sorrow, but he lets me walk away, why is he so careless and weak . . . ?

But I am thinking of us, our first meeting. An overheated apartment, graduate school . . . a girl in dark stockings, myself, frightened and eager, trying to be charming in a voice that didn't carry, a man in a baggy sweater, gentle, intelligent, a little perplexed, the two of us gravitating together, fearful of love and fearful of not loving, of not being loved. . . . So we met. The evening falls away, years fall away. I count only three miscarriages, really. The fourth a sentimental miscalculation.

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*

My darling,

I am out somewhere, I see a telephone booth on a corner, the air is windy and too balmy for October. I won't go in the phone booth. Crushed papers, a beer bottle, a close violent stench. . . . I walk past it, not thinking of you. I am out of the house so that you can't call me and so that I need not think of you. Do you talk to your wife every night, still? Does she weep into your ear? How many nights have you lain together, you and that woman now halfway across the country, in Boston, weeping into a telephone? Have you forgotten all those nights?

Last night I dreamt about you mashed into a highway. More than dead. I had to wake Greg up, I couldn't stop trembling, I wanted to tell him of the waste, the waste of joy and love, your being mashed soundlessly into a road and pounded into a shape no one would recognize as yours. . . . Your face was gone. What will happen to me when your face is gone from this world?

I parked the car down here so that I could go shopping at Saks but I've been walking, I'm almost lost. The streets are dirty. A tin can lies on the sidewalk, near a vacant lot. Campbell's Tomato Soup. I am dressed in the suit you like, though it is a little baggy on me, it would be a surprise for someone driving past to see a lady in such a suit bend to pick up a tin can. . . . I pick the can up. The edge is jagged and rusty. No insects inside. Why would insects be inside, why bother with an empty can? Idly I press the edge of the lid against my wrist, it isn't sharp, it makes only a fine white line on my skin, not sharp enough to penetrate the skin.

*

Dear Greg,

I hear you walking downstairs. You are going outside, out into the back yard. I am tempted, heart pounding, to run to the window and spy on you. But everything is tepid, the universe is dense with molecules, I can't get up. My legs won't move. You said last night, "The Mayor told me to shut up in front of Arthur Grant. He told me to shut up." You were amused and hurt at the same time, while I was furious, wishing you were . . . were someone else, someone who wouldn't be amused and hurt, a good

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man, a subdued man, but someone else who would tell that bastard to go to hell. I am a wife, jealous for her husband.

Three years you've spent working for the Mayor, His Honor, dodging reporters downtown. Luncheons, sudden trips, press conferences, conferences with committees from angry parts of Detroit, all of Detroit angry, white and black, bustling, ominous. Three years. Now he tells you to shut up. All the lies you told for him, not knowing how to lie with dignity, he tells you to shut up, my body suffers as if on the brink of some terrible final expulsion of our love, some blood-smear of a baby. When a marriage ends who is left to understand it? No witnesses. No young girl in black stockings, no young man, all those witnesses gone, grown up, moved on, lost.

Too many people know you now, your private life is dwindling. You are dragged back again and again to hearings, commission meetings, secret meetings, desperate meetings, television interviews, interviews with kids from college newspapers. Everyone has a right to know everything! *What Detroit Has Done to Combat Slums. What Detroit Has Done to Prevent Riots* updated to *What Detroit Has Done to Prevent a Recurrence of the 1967 Riot.* You people are rewriting history as fast as history happens. I love you, I suffer for you, I lie here in a paralysis of love, sorrow, density, idleness, lost in my love for you, my shame for having betrayed you. . . . Why should slums be combatted? Once I wept to see photographs of kids playing in garbage heaps, now I weep at crazy sudden visions of my lover's body become only a body, I have no tears left for anyone else, for anything else. Driving in the city I have a sudden vision of my lover dragged along by a stranger's car, his body somehow caught up under the bumper or the fender of a car and dragged along, bleeding wildly in the street. . . .

My dear husband, betraying you was the most serious act of my life. Far more serious than marrying you. I knew my lover better when he finally became my lover than I knew you when you became my husband. I know him better, now, than I know you. You and I have lived together for eight years. Smooth coins, coins worn smooth by constant handling. . . . I am a woman trapped in love, in the terror of love. Paralysis of love. Like a great tortoise, trapped in a heavy death-like shell, a mask of the body pressing the body down to earth. . . . I went for a week

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without seeing him, an experiment. The experiment failed. No husband can keep his wife's love. So you walk out in the back yard, admiring the leaves, the sky, the flagstone terrace, you are a man whom betrayal would destroy and yet your wife betrayed you, deliberately.

*

To the Editor:

Anonymously and shyly I want to ask—why are white men so weak, so feeble? The other day I left a friend at his hotel and walked quickly, alone, to my car, and the eyes of black men around me moved onto me with a strange hot perception, seeing everything. They knew, seeing me, what I was. Tension rose through the cracks in the sidewalk. Where are white men who are strong, who see women in this way? The molecules in the air of Detroit are humming. I wish I could take a knife and cut out an important piece of my body, my insides, and hold it up . . . on a street corner, an offering. Then will they let me alone? The black men jostle one another on street corners, out of work and not wanting work, content to stare at me, knowing everything in me, not surprised. My lover, a white man, remains back in the hotel, his head in his hands because I have walked out, but he won't run after me, he won't follow me. *They* follow me. One of them bumped into me, pretending it was an accident. I want to cut up my body, I can't live in this body.

Next door to us a boy is out in his driveway, sitting down, playing a drum. Beating on a drum. Is he crazy? A white boy of about sixteen pounding on a drum. He wants to bring the city down with that drum and I don't blame him. I understand that vicious throbbing.

*

Dear Marsha Katz,

Thank you for the baby clothes. Keep sending me things, test your imagination. I feel that you are drowning. I sense a tightness in your chest, your throat. Are your eyes leaden with defeat, you ten-year-old wonder? How many lives do children relive at the moment of death?

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*

Dear Mother and Father,

The temperature today is . Yesterday at this time, . Greg has been very busy as usual with , , . This weekend we must see the 's, whom you have met. How is the weather there? How is your vacation? Thank you for the postcard from . I had not thought lawns would be green there.

. . . The Mayor will ask all his aides for resignations, signed. Some he will accept and others reject. A kingly man, plump and divorced. Why can't I tell you about my husband's job, about my life, about anything real? Scandals fall on the head of my husband's boss, reading the paper is torture, yet my husband comes home and talks seriously about the future, about improvements, as if no chaos is waiting. No picketing ADC mothers, no stampede to buy guns, no strangled black babies found in public parks. In the midst of this my husband is clean and untouched, innocent, good. He has dedicated his life to helping others. I love him but cannot stop betraying him, again and again, having reclaimed my life as my own to throw away, to destroy, to lose. My life is my own. I keep on living.

*

My darling,

It is one-thirty and if you don't call by two, maybe you won't call, I know that you have a seminar from two to four, maybe you won't call today and everything will end. My heart pounds bitterly, in fear, in anticipation? Your daughter sent me some baby clothes, postmarked Boston, I understand her hatred, but one thing: how much did you tell your wife about me? About my wanting children? You told her you no longer loved her and couldn't live with her, that you loved another woman who could not marry you, but . . . did you tell her this other woman had no children? And what else?

I will get my revenge on you.

I walk through the house in a dream, in a daze. I am sinking slowly through the floor of this expensive house, a married woman

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in a body grown light as a shell, empty as a shell. My body has no other life in it, only its own. What you discharge in me is not life but despair. I can remember my body having life, holding it. It seemed a trick, a feat that couldn't possibly work: like trying to retain liquid up a reed, turning the reed upside down. The doctor said, "Babies are no trouble. Nothing." But the liquid ran out. All liquid runs out of me. That first week, meeting with you at the Statler, everything ran out of me like blood. I alarmed you, you with your nervous sense of fate, your fear of getting cancer, of having a nervous breakdown, I caused you to say stammering *But what if you get pregnant?* I am not pregnant but I feel a strange tingling of life, a tickling, life at a distance, as if the spirit of your daughter is somehow in me, lodged in me. She sucks at my insides with her pinched jealous lips, wanting blood. My body seeks to discharge her, magically.

*

My dear husband,

I wanted to test being alone. I went downtown to the library, the old library. I walked past the hotel where he and I have met, my lover and I, but we were not meeting today and I was alone, testing myself as a woman alone, a human being alone. The library was filled with old men. Over seventy, dressed in black, with white shirts. Black and white: a reading room of old men, dressed in black and white.

I sat alone at a table. Some of the old men glanced at me. In a dream I began to leaf through a magazine, thinking *Now I am leafing through a magazine; this is expected.* Why can't I be transformed to something else—to a mask, a shell, a statue? I glance around shyly, trying to gauge the nature of the story I am in. Is it tragic or only sad? The actors in this play all seem to be wearing masks, even I am wearing a mask, I am never naked. My nakedness, with my lover, is a kind of mask—something he sees, something I can't quite believe in. Women who are loved are in perpetual motion, dancing. We dance and men follow to the brink of madness and death, but what of us, the dancers?—when the dancing ends we stand back upon our heels, back upon our heels, dazed and hurt. Beneath the golden cloth on our thighs is flesh and flesh hurts. Men are not interested in the body, which feels

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pain, but in the rhythm of the body as it goes about its dance, the body of a woman who cannot stop dancing.

A confession. In Ann Arbor last April, at the symposium, I fell in love with a man. The visiting professor from Boston University—a man with black-rimmed glasses, Jewish, dark-eyed, dark-haired, nervous and arrogant and restless. Drumming his fingers. Smoking too much. (And you, my husband, were sane enough to give up smoking five years ago.) A student stood up in the first row and shouted out something and it was he, my lover, the man who would become my lover, who stood up in turn and shouted something back . . . it all happened so fast, astounding everyone, even the kid who reported for the campus newspaper didn't catch the exchange. How many men could handle a situation like that, being wilder and more profane than a heckler? . . . He was in the group at the party afterward, your friend Bryan's house. All of you talked at once, excited and angry over the outcome of the symposium, nervous at the sense of agitation in the air, the danger, and he and I wandered to the hostess's table, where food was set out. We made pigs of ourselves, eating. He picked out the shrimp and I demurely picked out tiny flakes of dough with miniature asparagus in them. Didn't you notice us? Didn't you notice this dark-browed man with the glasses that kept slipping down his nose, with the untidy black hair? We talked. We ate. I could see in his bony knuckles a hunger that would never be satisfied. And I, though I think I am starving slowly to death now, I leapt upon the food as if it were a way of getting at him, of drawing him into me. We talked. We wandered around the house. He looked out a window, drawing a curtain aside, at the early spring snowfall, falling gently outside, and he said that he didn't know why he had come to this part of the country, he was frightened of travelling, of strangers. He said that he was very tired. He seduced me with the slump of his shoulders. And when he turned back to me we entered another stage of the evening, having grown nervous and brittle with each other, the two of us, suddenly conscious of being together. My eyes grew hot and searing. I said carelessly that he must come over to Detroit sometime, we could have lunch, and he said at once, "I'd like that very much . . ." and then paused. Silence.

Later, in the hotel, in the cheap room he rented, he confessed to

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me that seeing my face had been an experience for him—did he believe in love at first sight, after all? something so childish? It had been some kind of love, anyway. We talked about our lives, about his wife, about my husband, and then he swung onto another subject, talking about his daughter for forty-five minutes. . . . A genius, a ten-year-old prodigy. I am brought low, astounded. I want to cry out to him, *But what about me! Don't stop thinking about me!* At the age of six his daughter was writing poems, tidy little poems, like Blake's. *Like Blake's? Yes.* At the age of eight she was publishing those poems.

No, I don't want to marry him. I'm not going to marry him. What we do to each other is too violent, I don't want it brought into marriage and domesticated, nor do I want him to see me at unflattering times of the day . . . getting up at three in the morning to be sick, a habit of mine. He drinks too much. He reads about the connection between smoking and death, and turns the page of the newspaper quickly. Superstitious, stubborn. In April he had a sore throat, that was why he spoke so hoarsely on the program . . . but a month later he was no better: "I'm afraid of doctors," he said. This is a brilliant man, the father of a brilliant child? We meet nowhere, at an unimaginative point X, in a hotel room, in the anonymous drafts of air from blowers that never stop blowing, the two of us yearning to be one, in this foreign dimension where anything is possible. Only later, hurrying to my car, do I feel resentment and fury at him . . . why doesn't he buy me anything, why doesn't he get a room for us, something permanent? And hatred for him rises in me in long shuddering surges, overwhelming me. I don't want to marry him. Let me admit the worst—anxious not to fall in love with him, I think of not loving him at the very moment he enters me, I think of him already boarding a plane and disappearing from my life, with relief, I think with pity of human beings and this sickness of theirs, this desire for unity. Why this desire for unity, why? We walk out afterward, into the sunshine or into the smog. Obviously we are lovers. Once I saw O'Leary, from the Highway Commission, he nodded and said a brisk hello to me, ignored my friend, obviously we are lovers, anyone could tell. We walked out in the daylight, looking for you. That day, feverish and aching, we were going to tell you everything. He was going to tell his wife every-

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thing. But nothing happened . . . we ended up in a cocktail lounge, we calmed down. The air conditioning calmed us. On the street we passed a Negro holding out pamphlets to other Negroes but drawing them back when whites passed. I saw the headline—*Muslim Killed in Miami Beach by Fascist Police.* A well-dressed Negro woman turned down a pamphlet with a toothy amused smile—none of that junk for her! My lover didn't even notice.

Because he is not my husband I don't worry about him. I worry about my own husband, whom I own. I don't own this man. I am thirty and he is forty-one, to him I am young, what a laugh, I don't worry about his coughing, his drinking (sometimes over the telephone I can hear ice cubes tinkling in a glass—he drinks to get the courage to call me), his loss of weight, his professional standing. He didn't return to his job in Boston, but stayed on here. A strange move. The department at Michigan considered it a coup to get him, this disintegrating, arrogant man, they were willing to pay him well, a man who has already made enemies there. No, I don't worry about him.

On a television program he was moody and verbose, moody and silent by turns. Smokes too much. Someone asked him about the effect of something on something—Vietnam on the presidential election, I think—and he missed subtleties, he sounded distant, vague. Has lost passion for the truth. He has lost his passion for politics, discovering in himself a passion for me. It isn't my fault. On the street he doesn't notice things, he smiles slowly at me, complimenting me, someone brushes against him and he doesn't notice, what am I doing to this man? Lying in his arms I am inspired to hurt him. I say that we will have to give this up, these meetings; too much risk, shame. What about my husband, what about his wife? (A deliberate insult—I know he doesn't love his wife.) I can see at once that I've hurt him, his face shows everything, and as soon as this registers in both of us I am stunned with the injustice of what I've done to him, I must erase it, cancel it out, undo it, I caress his body in desperation. . . . Again and again. A pattern. What do I know about caressing the bodies of men? I've known only two men in my life. My husband and his successor. I have never wanted to love anyone, the strain and risk are too great, yet I have fallen in love for the second time in my

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life and this time the sensation is terrifying, bitter, violent. It ends the first cycle, supplants all that love, erases all that affection—destroys everything. I stand back dazed, flat on my heels, the dance being over. I will not move on into another marriage. I will die slowly in this marriage rather than come to life in another.

*

Dear Mrs. Katz,

I received your letter of October 25 and I can only say

I don't know how to begin this letter except to tell you

Your letter is here on my desk. I've read it over again and again all morning. Is it true, yes, that I have made the acquaintance of a man who is evidently your husband, though he has not spoken of you. We met through mutual friends in Ann Arbor and Detroit. Your informant at the University is obviously trying to upset you, for her own reasons. I assume it is a woman—who else would write you such a letter? I know nothing of your personal affairs. Your husband and I have only met a few times, socially. What do you want from me?

And your daughter, tell your daughter to let me alone!

Thank you both for thinking of me. I wish I could be equal to your hatred. But the other day an old associate of my husband's, a bitch of a man, ran into me in the Fisher lobby and said, "What's happened to you—you look terrible! You've lost weight!" He pinched the waist of my dress, drawing it out to show how it hung loose on me, he kept marvelling over how thin I am, not releasing me. A balding, pink-faced son of a bitch, who has made himself rich by being on the board of supervisors for a county north of here, stuffing himself at the trough. I know all about him. A sub-politician, never elected. But I trust the eyes of these sub-men, their hot keen perception. Nothing escapes them. "One month ago," he said, "you were a beautiful woman." Nothing in my life has hurt me as much as that remark, *One month ago you were a beautiful woman. . . .*

Were you ever beautiful? He says not. So he used you, he used you up. That isn't my fault. You say in your letter—thank you for typing it, by the way—that I could never understand your husband, his background of mental instability, his weaknesses, his penchant (your word) for blaming other people for his own

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faults. Why tell me this? He isn't going to be my husband. I have a husband. Why should I betray my husband for yours, your nervous guilty hypochrondriac husband? The first evening we met, believe it or not, he told me about his *hurts*—people who've hurt him deeply! "The higher you go in a career the more people take after you, wanting to bring you down," he told me. And listen: "The worst hurt of my life was when my first book came out, and an old professor of mine, a man I had idolized at Columbia, reviewed it. He began by saying *Bombarded as we are by prophecies in the guise of serious historical research* . . . and my heart was broken." We were at a party but apart from the other people, we ate, he drank, we played a game with each other that made my pulse leap, and certainly my pulse leaped to hear a man, a stranger, speak of his heart being broken—where I come from men don't talk like that! I told him a *hurt* of my own, which I've never told anyone before: "The first time my mother saw my husband, she took me aside and said *Can't you tell him to stand up straighter?* and my heart was broken. . . ."

And so, with those words, I had already committed adultery, betraying my husband to a stranger.

Does he call you every night? I am jealous of those telephone calls. What if he changes his mind and returns to you, what then? When he went to the Chicago convention I'm sure he telephoned you constantly (he telephoned me only three times, the bastard) and joked to you about his fear of going out into the street. "Jesus, what if somebody smashes in my head, there goes my next book!" he said over the phone, but he wasn't kidding me. I began to cry, imagining him beaten up, bloody, far away from me. Why does he joke like that? Does he joke like that with you?

*

Dear Mother and Father,

My husband Greg is busy with . Doing well. Not fired. Pressure on, pressure off. Played golf with . I went to a new doctor yesterday, a woman. I had made an appointment to go to a man but lost my courage, didn't show up. Better a woman. She examined me, she looked at me critically and said, "Why are you trying to starve yourself?" *To keep myself from feeling love, from feeling lust, from feeling anything at all.* I told her I didn't know

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I was starving myself. I had no appetite. Food sickened me . . . how could I eat? She gave me a vitamin shot that burned me, like fire. Things good for you burn like fire, shot up into you, no escape. You would not like my lover, you would take me aside and say *Jews are very brilliant and talented, yes, but. . . .*

I am surviving at half-tempo. A crippled waltz tempo. It is only my faith in the flimsiness of love that keeps me going—I know this will end. I've been waiting for it to end since April, having faith. Love can't last. Even lust can't last. I loved my husband and now I do not love him, we never sleep together, that's through. Since he isn't likely to tell you that, I will. He would never even think about it.

Lloyd Burt came to see my husband the other day, downtown. Eleven in the morning and already drunk. His kid had been stopped in Grosse Pointe, speeding. The girl with him knocked out on pills. *He* had no pills on him, luckily. Do you remember Lloyd? Do you remember any of us? I am your daughter. Do you regret having had a daughter? I do not regret having no children, not now. Children, more children, children upon children, protoplasm upon protoplasm. . . . Once I thought I couldn't bear to live without having children, now I can't bear to live at all, I must be the wife of a man I can't have, I don't even want children from him, I sit here in my room with my head and body aching with a lust that has become metaphysical and skeptical and bitter, living on month after month, cells dividing and heating endlessly. I don't regret having no children. I don't thank you for having me. No gratitude in me, nothing. No, I feel no gratitude. I can't feel gratitude.

*

My dear husband,

I want to tell you everything. I am in a motel room, I've just taken a bath. How can I keep a straight face telling you this? Sat in the bath tub for an hour, not awake, not asleep, the water was very hot. . . .

I seem to want to tell you something else, about Sally Rodgers. I am light-headed, don't be impatient. I met Sally at the airport this afternoon, she was going to New York, and she saw me with a

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man, a stranger to her, the man who is the topic of this letter, the crucial reason for this letter. . . . Sally came right up to me and started talking, exclaiming about her bad fortune, her car had been stolen last week! then when she and a friend took her boat out of the yacht club and docked it at a restaurant on the Detroit River, she forgot to take the keys out and someone stole her boat! twenty-thousand dollars' worth of boat, a parting gift from her ex-husband, pirated away downriver. She wore silver eyelids, silver stockings, attracting attention not from men but from small children, who stared. My friend, my lover, did not approve of her —her clanking jewelry made his eye twitch.

I am twenty miles from Detroit. In Detroit the multiplication of things is too brutal, I think it broke me down. Weak, thin, selfish, a wreck, I have become oblivious to the deaths of other people (Robert Kennedy was murdered since I became this man's mistress, but I had no time to think of him—I put the thought of his death aside, to think of later. No time now.) Leaving him and walking in Detroit, downtown, on those days we met to make love, I began to understand what love is. Holding a man between my thighs, my knees, in my arms, one single man out of all this multiplication of men, this confusion, this din of human beings. So it is we choose someone. Someone chooses us. I admit that if he did not love me so much I couldn't love him. It would pass. But a woman has no choice, let a man love her and she must love him, if the man is strong enough. I stopped loving you, I am a criminal. . . . I see myself sinking again and again beneath his body, those heavy shoulders with tufts of dark hair on them, again and again pressing my mouth against his, wanting something from him, betraying you, giving myself up to that throbbing that arises out of my heartbeat and builds to madness and then subsides again, slowly, to become my ordinary heartbeat again, the heartbeat of an ordinary body from which divinity has fled.

Flesh with an insatiable soul. . . .

You would hear in a few weeks, through your innumerable far-flung cronies, that my lover's daughter almost died of aspirin poison, a ten-year-old girl with an I.Q. of about 200. But she didn't die. She took aspirin because her father was leaving her, divorcing her mother. The only gratitude I can feel is for her not having died. . . . My lover, whom you hardly know (he's the

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man of whom you said that evening "He certainly can talk!") telephoned me to give me this news, weeping over the phone. A man weeping. A man weeping turns a woman's heart to stone. I told him I would drive out at once, I'd take him to the airport. He had to catch the first plane home and would be on stand-by, at the airport. So I drove to Ann Arbor to get him. I felt that we were already married and that passion had raced through us and left us, years ago, as soon as I saw him lumbering to the car, a man who has lost weight in the last few months but who carries himself a little clumsily, out of absent-mindedness. He wore a dark suit, rumpled. His necktie pulled away from his throat. A father distraught over his daughter belongs to mythology. . . .

Like married people, like conspirators, like characters in a difficult scene hurrying their lines, uncertain of the meaning of lines. . . . "It's very thoughtful of you to do this," he said, and I said, "What else can I do for you? Make telephone calls? Anything?" *Should I go along with you?* So I drive him to the airport. I let him out at the curb, he hesitates, not wanting to go without me, he says, "But aren't you coming in . . . ?" and I see fear in his face, I tell him yes, yes, but I must park the car. This man, so abrupt and insulting in his profession, a master of whining rhetoric, stares at me in bewilderment as if he cannot remember why I have brought him here to let him out at the United Airlines terminal, why I am eager to drive away. "I can't park here," I tell him sanely, "I'll get a ticket." He respects all minor law; he nods and backs away. It takes me ten minutes to find a parking place. All this time I am sweating in the late October heat, thinking that his daughter is going to win after all, has already won. Shouldn't I just drive home and leave him, put an end to it? A bottle of aspirin was all it took. The tears I might almost shed are not tears of shame or regret but tears of anger—that child has taken my lover from me. That child! I don't cry, I don't allow myself to cry, I drive all the way through a parking lot without finding a place and say to the girl at the booth, who puts her hand out expecting a dime, "But I couldn't find a place! I've driven right through! This isn't fair!" Seeing my hysteria she relents, opens the gate, lets me through. *Once a beautiful woman,* she is thinking. I try another parking lot.

Inside the terminal a moment of panic—what if he has already

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left? Then he hurries to me. I take his arm. He squeezes my hand. Both of us very nervous, agitated. "They told me I can probably make the two-fifteen, can you wait with me?" he says. His face, now so pale, is a handsome man's face gone out of control; a pity to look upon it. In a rush I feel my old love for him, hopeless. I begin to cry. Silently, almost without tears. A girl in a very short skirt passes us with a smile—lovers, at their age! "You're not to blame," he says, very nervous, "she's just a child and didn't know what she was doing—please don't blame yourself! It's my fault—" But a child tried to commit suicide, shouldn't someone cry? I am to blame. She is hurting me across the country. I have tried to expel her from life and she, the baby, the embryo, stirs with a will of her own and chooses death calmly. . . . "But she's going to recover," I say to him for the twentieth time, "isn't she? You're sure of that?" He reassures me. We walk.

The airport is a small city. Outside the plate glass airplanes rise and sink without effort. Great sucking vacuums of power, enormous wings, windows brilliant with sunlight. We look on unamazed. To us these airplanes are unspectacular. We walk around the little city, walking fast and then slowing down, wandering, holding hands. It is during one of those strange lucky moments that lovers have—he lighting a cigarette—that Sally comes up to us. We are not holding hands at that moment. She talks, bright with attention for my friend, she herself being divorced and not equipped to live without a man, he smiles nervously, ignoring her, watching people hurry by with their luggage. She leaves. We glance at each other, understanding each other. Nothing to say. *My darling!* . . .

Time does not move quickly. I am sweating again, I hope he won't notice, he is staring at me in that way . . . that way that frightens me. I am not equal to your love, I want to tell him. Not equal, not strong enough. I am ashamed. Better for us to say goodbye. A child's corpse between us? A few hundred miles away, in Boston, are a woman and a child I have wronged, quite intentionally; aren't these people real? But he stares at me, the magazine covers on a newsstand blur and wink, I feel that everything is becoming a dream and I must get out of here, must escape from him, before it is too late. . . . "I should leave," I tell him. He seems not to hear. He is sick. Not sick, frightened. He shows too

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much. He takes my hand, caresses it, pleading in silence. A terrible sensation of desire rises in me, surprising me. I don't want to feel desire for him! I don't want to feel it for anyone, I don't want to feel anything at all! I don't want to be drawn to an act of love, or even to think about it, I want freedom, I want the smooth sterility of coins worn out from friendly handling rubbing together, I want to say goodbye to love at the age of thirty, not being strong enough for it. A woman in the act of love feels no joy but only terror, a parody of labor, giving birth. Torture. Heartbeat racing at 160, 180 beats a minute, where is joy in this, what is this deception, this joke, isn't the body itself a joke?

He leads me somewhere, along a corridor. Doesn't know where he is going. People head toward us, with suitcases. A soldier on leave from Vietnam, we don't notice, a Negro woman weeping over another soldier, obviously her son, my lover does not see. A man brushes against me and with exaggerated fear I jump to my lover's side . . . but the man keeps on walking, it is nothing. My lover strokes my damp hand. "You won't . . . you're not thinking of. . . . What are you thinking of?" he whispers. Everything is open in him, everything. He is not ashamed of the words he says, of his fear, his pleading. No irony in him, this ironic man. And I can hear myself saying that we must put an end to this, it's driving us both crazy and there is no future, nothing ahead of us, but I don't say these words or anything like them. We walk along. I am stunned. I feel a heavy, ugly desire for him, for his body. I want him as I've wanted him many times before, when our lives seemed simpler, when we were both deluded about what we were doing . . . both of us thought, in the beginning, that no one would care if we fell in love . . . not my husband, not his family. I don't know why. Now I want to say goodbye to him but nothing comes out, nothing. I am still crying a little. It is not a weapon of mine—it is an admission of defeat. I am not a woman who cries well. Crying is a confession of failure, a giving in. I tell him no, I am not thinking of anything, only of him. I love him. I am not thinking of anything else.

We find ourselves by Gate 10. What meaning has Gate 10 to us? People are lingering by it, obviously a plane has just taken off, a stewardess is shuffling papers together, everything is normal. I sense normality and am drawn to it. We wander on. We

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come to a doorway, a door held open by a large block of wood. Where does that lead to? A stairway. The stairway is evidently not open. We can see that it leads up to another level, a kind of runway, and though it is not open he takes my hand and leads me to the stairs. In a delirium I follow him, why not? The airport is so crowded that we are alone and anonymous. He kicks the block of wood away, wisely. We are alone. On this stairway—which smells of disinfectant and yet is not very clean—my lover embraces me eagerly, wildly, he kisses me, kisses my damp cheeks, rubs his face against mine. I half-fall, half-sit on the stairs. He begins to groan, or to weep. He presses his face against me, against my breasts, my body. It is like wartime—a battle is going on outside, in the corridor. Hundreds of people! A world of people jostling one another! Here, in a dim stairway, clutching each other, we are oblivious to their deaths. But I want to be good! What have I wanted in my life, except to be good? To lead a simple, good, intelligent life? He kisses my knees, my thighs, my stomach. I embrace him against me. Everything has gone wild, I am seared with the desire to be unfaithful to a husband who no longer exists, nothing else matters except this act of unfaithfulness, I feel that I am a character in a story, a plot, who has not understood until now exactly what is going to happen to her. Selfish, eager, we come together and do not breathe, we are good friends and anxious to help each other, I am particularly anxious to help him, my soul is sweated out of me in those two or three minutes that we cling together, in love. Then, moving from me, so quickly exhausted, he puts his hands to his face and seems to weep, without tears, while I feel my eyelids closing slowly upon the mangled length of my body. . . .

This is a confession but part of it is blacked out. Minutes pass in silence, mysteriously. It is those few minutes that pass after we make love that are most mysterious to me, uncanny. And then we cling to each other again, like people too weak to stand by ourselves; we are sick in our limbs but warm with affection, very good friends, the kind of friends who tell each other only good news. He helps me to my feet. We laugh. Laughter weakens me, he has to hold me, I put my arms firmly around his neck and we kiss, I am ready to give up all my life for him, just to hold him like this. My body is all flesh. There is nothing empty about us, only a

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close space, what appears to be a stairway in some public place. . . . He draws my hair back from my face, he stares at me. It is obvious that he loves me.

When we return to the public corridor no one had missed us. It is strangely late, after three. This is a surprise, I am really surprised, but my lover is more businesslike and simply asks at the desk—the next plane? to Boston? what chance of his getting on? His skin is almost ruddy, with pleasure. I can see what pleasure does to a man. But now I must say goodbye, I must leave. He holds my hand. I linger. We talk seriously and quietly in the middle of the great crowded floor about his plans—he will stay in Boston as long as he must, until things are settled; he will see his lawyer; he will talk it over, *talk it over,* with his wife and his daughter, he will not leave until they understand why he has to leave. . . . I want to cry out at him, *Should you come back?* but I can't say anything. Everything in me is a curving to submission, in spite of what you, my husband, have always thought.

Finally . . . he boards a plane at four. I watch him leave. He looks back at me, I wave, the plane taxis out the runway and rises . . . no accident, no violent ending. There is nothing violent about us, everything is natural and gentle. Walking along the long corridor I bump into someone, a woman my own age. I am suddenly dizzy. She says, "Are you all right?" I turn away, ashamed. I am on fire! My body is on fire! I feel his semen stirring in my loins, that rush of heat that always makes me pause, staring into the sky or at a wall, at something blank to mirror the blankness in my mind . . . stunned I feel myself so heavily a body, so lethargic with the aftermath of passion. How did I hope to turn myself into a statue, into the constancy of a soul? No hope. The throbbing in my loins has not yet resolved itself into the throbbing of my heart. A woman does not forget so quickly, nothing lets her forget. I am transparent with heat. I walk on, feeling my heart pound weakly, feeling the moisture between my legs, wondering if I will ever get home. My vision seems blotched. The air—air-conditioning—is humming, unreal. It is not alien to me but a part of my own confusion, a long expulsion of my own breath. What do I look like, making love? Is my face distorted, am I ugly? Does he see me? Does he judge? Or does he see nothing but beauty, transported in love as I am, helpless?

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I can't find the car. Which parking lot? The sun is burning. A man watches me, studies me. I walk fast to show that I know what I'm doing. And if the car is missing, stolen . . . ? I search through my purse, noting how the lining is soiled, ripped. Fifty thousand dollars in the bank and no children and I can't get around to buying a new purse, everything is soiled, ripped, worn-out . . . the keys are missing . . . only wadded tissue, a sweetish smell, liquid stiffening on the tissue . . . everything hypnotizes me. . . . I find the keys, my vision swims. I will never get home.

My knees are trembling. There is an ocean of cars here at Metropolitan Airport. Families stride happily to cars, get in, drive away. I wander around, staring. I must find my husband's car in order to get home. . . . I check in my purse again, panicked. No, I haven't lost the keys. I take the keys out of my purse to look at them. The key to the ignition, to the trunk, to the front door of the house. All there. I look around slyly and see, or think I see, a man watching me. He moves behind a car. He is walking away. My body still throbs from the love of another man, I can't concentrate on a stranger, I lose interest and forget what I am afraid of. . . .

The heat gets worse. Thirty, forty, forty-five minutes pass. . . . I have given up looking for the car. . . . I am not lost, I am still heading home in my imagination, but I have given up looking for the car. I turn terror into logic. I ascend the stairway to the wire-guarded overpass that leads back to the terminal, walking sensibly, and keep on walking until I come to one of the airport motels. A small city, this motel, the bizarre made domestic. I ask them for a room. A single. Why not? Before I can go home I must bathe, I must get the odor of this man out of me, I must clean myself. I take a room, I close the door to the room behind me, alone, I go to the bathroom and run a tubful of water. . . .

And if he doesn't call me from Boston then all is finished, at an end. What good luck, to be free again and alone, the way I am alone in this marvelous empty motel room! the way I am alone in this bathtub, cleansing myself of him, of every cell of him!

•

My darling,

You have made me so happy. . . .

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JOHN HAINES

In the Middle of America

1

In Oberlin, the university park
with its trodden snow
and black, Siberian trees:

there were puffs of yellow
smoke in the branches,
sullen flashes
from distant windows.

The hooded figures of partisans
swirled around me,
hauling their weapons
from one bivouac to another.

2

Thereafter, on that cold
spring morning,
I saw the bird of omen
alight in a thicket.

Like my own heart, a flower
folded in upon itself,
bitterly dreaming,
it wore brightly the color
of blood and rebellion.

3

In the middle of America
I came to an old house
stranded on a wintry hill.

It contained a fire; men and women
of an uncertain generation

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gathered before it. The talk
was of border-crossings,
mass refusals, flag-burnings,
and people who stand or fall.

I moved among them like
a shadowy soldier; I listened,
began dimly to understand.

A Poem Like a Grenade

It is made to be rolled down
a flight of stairs,
placed under a guilty hat,
or casually dropped into a basket
among the desks
of the stolid statesmen.

As it tumbles on the carpeted stairs
or settles quietly
in its wire-wicker nest,
it begins to unfold,
a ragged flower whose raw petals
burn and scar . . .

its wastepaper soil catches fire,
the hat is blown from its hook.
Five or six faces are suddenly,
permanently altered . . .

those minds are changed for good.

There will be many poems written
in the shape of a grenade—
from the hard bits of metal given off
even a government
might catch its death.

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The Pitcher of Milk

Today is the peace of this mist
and its animals, as if all
the cows and goats of the land
gave milk to the dawn.

The same mist that rises
from battlefields, out of the mouths
and eye-sockets of horse
and man, it mingles with smoke
from birch fires
of the homesteader's clearing.

I and the others come to the doors
of cold houses, called
by the thin ringing of a spoon;

we stand with our brimming bowls,
like blind apostles
called to where God awakens
in a cloud of white blood.

The Cloud Factory

Mountains and cold places of the earth
are no man's garden. Here, for instance,
they make other uses of rain.

First it is beaten into a froth like thin milk, then spun
into something like the fleece of angels.
Stretched and wrung out over alpine basins,

it is wadded into bundles,
and these are pitched down the paths

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of glaciers—as they fall,
they are shot full of damp stars.

Then the wind comes and carries the clouds
away into valleys and harbors.

And all this takes place in an atmosphere
of wrapped sounds, like the silence of bandages.

A magpie is the bird of this world,
watchman of the cloudworks.
Made of black and white holes constantly
disappearing into one another,
he treads with difficult dignity,
the iridescence of his office
smothered in a bag of grey feathers.

Man and Woman in the Sunset

From the woman, half-clothed,
with a full moon rising behind her
and a burning arm upraised,
as if she called to the Pacific
for an armada of suns;

to the man sitting beside her
like a blue survivor of the trenches,
lifting a shrunken arm to his forehead
as he turns away into nightfall;

passes the memory of a shared country,
never completely whole,
warmed a little by her dying flesh,
made cold by his burden of grief.

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Choosing a Stone

It grows cold in the forest
of rubble.

There the old hunters survive
and patch their tents with tar.

They light fires in the night
of obsidian—
instead of trees they burn
old bottles and windowpanes.

Instead of axe-blows and leaves
falling,
there is always the sound
of moonlight breaking,
of brittle stars ground together.

The talk there is of deadfalls
and pits armed
with splinters of glass,

and of how one chooses a stone.

In Nature

Here too are life's victims,
captives of an old umbrella,
lives wrecked
by the lifting of a stone.

Sailors marooned
on the island of a leaf
when their ship
of mud and straw went down.

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Explorers lost
among roots and raindrops;
drunkards sleeping it off
in the fields of pollen.

Penal colonies
from which no one returns,
whose meaning is salt.

Here too the people of color,
and those who cannot be seen,
march on a distant capitol;

in the silent heat
of a neighborhood,
life's barriers
are built and broken.

The Elements

I have forgotten to name them:

the rivers always flowing
into the heart of another silence,
the eagle nailed to a snowy summit,
and the salamander,
formed of volcanic dust.

Also the women of the moon
with their narrow, green eyes,
whose portents sent me weeping.

I waited on a corner of the earth
for the wind to move me—
it was nine o'clock on a summer
evening, and the sun rose.

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Instructions to a Sentry

You will be standing alone,
leaning toward sundown.
Listen, and mutter
the name of an enemy.

Blown upon by the night wind,
you will be changed
into a more primitive tree,
a conifer
with an armful of ravens,
decorated with bloody cones,
bandaged with snow.

From a moaning and creaking empire
will come the night messengers,
creatures of wing and fur
whispering words that are like leaves
driven before
the immense occupation of winter.
But you will stand fast,
sleep upright,
wooden-hearted soldier.

On this evening of all evenings,
as the sunlit camp
slowly retreats under the tent
of a shadow, remember
how once a demented prophet
described this land:

the horizon where a peachtree
calmly ripened,
how the cow of that wilderness
stood guard
in her thicket of fire.

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Terminal Images

At midnight
in a Chicago bus terminal
I lifted a newspaper
from a sleeping man . . .

I read of the shadows
that once were people,
waiting with broken glass
under their heels,
ill spirits dreaming a riot.

Against them, an old story:
obedient men assembling,
wearing the last war's helmets,
badly equipped for life.

Once they bowled dead Indian heads
down the wide, green slopes
of America; now among crocuses,
there are children's games
with skulls, plucked ears
drying at the belts
of sweaty little corporals.

Over the headlines
loomed the bland forehead
of a polished egg,
and I saw it shatter.

I took my place with the others
as the engine started,
and we rolled into the deepening
hollow of a continent.

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OCTAVIO PAZ

Presence and the Present

In his first piece of writing on the plastic arts (*Salon de 1845*), dealing with a canvas showing the dying Emperor Marcus Aurelius entrusting young Commodus to his Stoic friends, Baudelaire writes with his natural impetuosity: *"Nous sommes ici en plein Delacroix, c'est-à-dire que nous avons devant les yeux l'un des spécimens les plus complets de ce que peut le génie dans la peinture."* A few lines later, in a single sentence, he explains the reason for his fascination with that painting of the historico-philosophical genre: *"Cette pondération du vert et du rouge plaît à notre âme."* Not the theme or the figures, but the relationship between two colors, one cool and the other warm. The presence that the painting brings out is not an image of history or philosophy but the blending of a blue and a red, a yellow and a violet. The body and the soul—the pagan tradition and the Christian—reduced to a visual vibration: music for the eyes. Ten years later as he views Delacroix's painting again, he is even more explicit and definitive: *"D'abord il faut remarquer, et c'est très important, que vue à une distance trop grande pour analyser ou même comprendre le sujet, un tableau de Delacroix a déjà produit sur l'âme une impression riche, heureuse ou mélancolique. . . . Il semble que cette couleur, qu'on me pardonne ces subterfuges de langage pour exprimer des idées fort délicates, pense pour elle-même, indépendamment des objets qu'elle habille."* To see a picture is to hear it: to understand what it is saying. Painting, which is a music, also, and above all, is language. The idea of language contains that of translation: a painter is one who translates words into plastic images; the critic is a poet who translates the lines and colors into words. The artist is the universal translator. That translation, of course, is a transmutation. It consists, as is well known, of the interpretation of non-linguistic signs by means of linguistic signs—or the reverse. But each one of these translations is really another work and not so much a copy as a metaphor of the original. I shall deal with that theme later on; for the mo-

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ment I wish to point out how, with the same vehemence with which he holds that analogy is the only approach to painting, Baudelaire asserts that color thinks, *independently* of the objects that it clothes. My commentary will begin with an analysis of that assertion.

At the core of sensory experience, the analogy between language and painting is perfect. The first consists of a combination of a limited series of sounds; the second of a combination of a series of lines and colors. Painting obeys the same rules of opposition and affinity that govern language; in the one case the combination produces visual forms and in the other verbal ones. Like the word, a repository of a gamut of virtual meetings, one of which becomes actualized in the phrase according to its position in the context, color has no value by itself: it is only a relationship, *"l'accord de deux tons."* For that reason it cannot be defined in an absolute way: *"les couleurs n'existent que relativement."* One might say in a similar way about drawing that it is only a system of lines, a group of relationships. Therefore, as soon as one leaves the sphere of the sensory—sound in language, color and design in painting—he finds a notable difference: a phrase (a combination of words) is translated by another phrase; a painting (a combination of colors and lines) is translated by a phrase. The transition from the sensory to the intelligible is not realized within the painting but outside of it: the meaning is unfolded in a non-pictorial universe. Or, stated in a different way: the language of painting is a system of signs that find their significance in other systems. Baudelaire says so himself: color is a dress or, to employ again a musical metaphor, an accompaniment.

Every pictorial work from every civilization, except those that are purely ornamental and those of the modern period, presents two levels: one truly pictorial and another extra- or metapictorial. The first consists of the relationships between lines and colors; those relationships construct or, more exactly, *weave* the second level: a real or imaginary object. The pictorial level places us in a representation and this into a world that is no longer that of the painting. All representation is symbolic, of course, and hence the object painted can never be either a copy or a reproduction of the original. Another noteworthy characteristic: the less representative the object is, the less pictorial the paint-

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ing tends to be and the more it merges with writing. The arabesque of Islamic civilization, for example, the colors on the walls of Teotihuacán and in the Mexican codices, the tantric painting of Hindu and Buddhist India. In the last the colors and lines think and speak for themselves because, on the borderline between words and painting, they are articulated like a discourse. When we look at a scroll of tantric paintings, just the opposite of what happens when we look at a Chinese scroll, we are not *seeing* a succession of scenes and landscapes, but we are *reading* a ritual. Painting is freed of the tyranny of representation only to fall into the bondage of writing. Plastic values are not autonomous, therefore: they always cling to an object. Without them there would be no representation; without it painting would have no meaning.

Presence never appears exactly as it is: the sign is interposed between it and us. The form in which presence appears is the representation. Being is invisible and we are condemned to see it through a dress woven out of symbols. The world is a cluster of signs. Representation signifies the distance between the full presence and our look: it is the signal of our changing and finite temporality, the mark of death. It is the bridge of access, therefore, even if not to pure and self-contained presence, to its reflection: our answer to death and being, to the unthinkable and the unsayable. If representation is not the abolition of distance—what is felt never coincides entirely with being—, it is the transfiguration of presence, its metaphor.

No civilization has placed in doubt the relationship between the pictorial and the metapictorial, plastic values and representation. The more or less clear awareness of that relationship impeded, it seems to me, the intermingling of one level and the other: what was distinctive, "worthy of being seen," was neither the subject nor the object represented, but the painting itself, although invariably and necessarily in relationship to what it represented. Color and line make up the representation and the latter means them. But as soon as the painting begins to achieve its autonomy, this relationship becomes contradictory. In spite of the fact that the process begins in the Renaissance, from the point of view of criticism the beginning of this excision comes with Kant's esthetics: the contemplation of the beautiful places

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the stress on the pictorial. At the same time, modern philosophy submits certainties, systems, and traditional beliefs to a radical analysis; former meanings fall apart and with them the representations. Starting with Baudelaire, the relationship is broken: colors and lines cease to serve representation and aspire to mean themselves. Painting does not weave a presence: it is a presence itself. This break opens a double path that is also an abyss. If color and drawing are really a presence, they cease to be language, and the picture returns to the world of things. Such has been the fate of a good part of contemporary painting. The other direction, sensed by Baudelaire, is condensed in the formula: color thinks, painting is language. It is the other route of modern art, the purgative route.

By renouncing the representation that formerly gave it meaning, painting becomes converted into a cluster of signs projected in a space empty of meanings. The space formerly inhabited by the representation is populated or, rather, is covered by enigmas: what does the painting say? The relationships between the viewer and the work suffer a radical inversion: the work is no longer a reply to the question of the viewer but becomes a question in itself. The answer (or: the meaning) depends on the person looking at the painting. The picture proposes a contemplation to us—not of what it shows but of a presence that the colors and the forms evoke without ever showing it completely: a really invisible presence. Painting is a language incapable of being spoken except by omission and allusion: a picture gives us the signs of an absence. The first consequence of the break was the substitution of literal interpretation for the analogical, the end of criticism as judgment and the birth of poetical criticism. No less decisive was the concealment of the presence. Formerly painting not only alluded to a presence but, by representing it, wove a transparency: not the incarnation of the presence, but its transfiguration. If the representation gave meaning to the painting, the latter animated the first: gave it life. By giving it form, it transformed it into a visible and touchable image. From Baudelaire on, painting thinks and does not speak, it is language and it has no meaning; it is material and it forms resplendencies, but it has ceased to be an image. I conclude: Baudelaire's originality does not consist solely in having been one of the first to formulate an

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esthetic of modern art; one must add the fact that what he proposed to us was an esthetic of *disincarnation.*

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All of Baudelaire's critical work is fraught with a contradictory tension. The opposition between the pictorial and the metapictorial, resolved in the last analysis in favor of the first, is also reproduced in the likewise contradictory relationship between "the eternal and the transitory," the ideal model and the singular beauty. As in the case of color, the eternal and the transitory defy all definition when separated. The eternal is undefinable by nature, which fact serves as the basis for making the modern stand out. Baudelaire's descriptions are negative and tend to underline the static and undifferentiated character of the eternal as well as of the classical ideal of beauty. On the other hand, the modern and its equivalent in space, the singular and the bizarre, are dynamic and affirmative. They are a break—a break that assures continuity; they are newness—a newness that reintroduces into the present an immemorial beginning. Baudelaire's attitude again implies an inversion of the traditional perspective. Previously, the past, the presumptive repository of the eternal, defined the present; and it defined it in a strict way: artistic creation was an imitation of archetypes, whether the works of antiquity or of nature itself. Nowadays the eternal depends upon the present: on the one hand, the present is a criticism of tradition, so that each moment is simultaneously a refutation of eternity and is its metamorphosis into a transitory newness; on the other hand, the eternal is nothing but a plural, and there are as many kinds of beauty as there are races, epochs, and civilizations: *"tout peuple est académique en jugeant les autres, tout peuple est barbare lorsqu' il est jugé."* A redemption of the art of non-European peoples: *"le beau est toujours bizarre."* But what is the bizarre? Again: it is nothing but a relationship. It is not difficult to understand Baudelaire's reticence when faced with definitions: it is impossible to build a system based on the value of the transitory and the particular because both of them, by their very nature, are what escapes definition, the unknown quantity that makes systems fall apart. Precisely because the modern and the bizarre are changing and unpredictable realities, even though

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always present, every system is fanciful, not excluding those that pretend to be based on an eternal canon. A system is "*une espèce de damnation qui nous pousse à une abjuration perpétuelle. . . . Pour échapper à l'horreur de ces apostasies philosophiques, je me suis orgueilleusement résigné à la modestie: je me suis contenté de sentir.*" An esthetic that renounces reflection, a headless art? Rather an esthetic that leans towards the horrors and marvels of succession, an art fascinated by the renewed appearance of the sign of death in every living form.

Since modernity is undefinable, Baudelaire gives us an enumeration. The ancient is public show; the modern is private life. In the one case, hierarchy and ceremony; in the other, democracy and simplicity. By its color and its cut, ancient clothing made a spectacle out of life and exalted those who wore it; modern colors, black and gray, are an expression of universal equality and do not serve to expose but to hide. Ancient fashion separated, singled out, distinguished; the modern is "*une livrée uniforme de désolation . . . une immense défilade de croque-morts—croque-morts politiques, croque-morts amoureux, croque-morts bourgeois. Nous célébrons tous quelque enterrement.*" Here again the law of contrast or complementary opposition comes into play: in a uniform society, the people who stand out in their singularity are not the representative individuals, as in antiquity, but the eccentric and marginal ones: the dandy, the artist, the criminal, "*les filles entretenues,*" the solitary person lost in the crowd, the beggar, the wanderer. Not notable men: exceptional beings. Modern beauty is strangeness. (Incidentally, what would Baudelaire have had to say about the socialization of dandyism on Carnaby Street? Our modernity is the reverse of his: we have converted eccentricity into a value for popular consumption. Three moments of the West: during the *ancien régime* private life was lived ceremoniously; in the nineteenth century as a secret novel; in the twentieth, private life is lived in public. . . .) For Baudelaire the modern is the opposite of the public; it is the unusual, provided that it be private and even clandestine. Hence the importance of make-up and masks which reveal and hide at the same time. For women the modern is "secret distinction," a kind of "infernal or divine heroism:" the bedroom as the cave of an enchantress or the sanctuary of a bloodthirsty

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priestess. Modern too are humor, melancholy, disdain, brazen sensibility, synesthesia, spirituality, the taste for infinite things, dreams, travel—not to conquer lands but to flee the world of progress. In short: subjectivity, inner beauty. Made up of contrary things, modernity is also the here and now of the streets, the irregular in crowds and fashions. There is one death that is ancient and another that is modern. Hercules killed himself because *"les brûlures de sa robe deviennent intolérables,"* Cato because *"il ne peut plus rien faire pour la liberté,"* and Cleopatra because *"elle perd son trône et son amant. . . . Mais aucun ne se détruit pour changer de peau en vue de la métempsychose,"* like Balzac's hero. What then is modernity if not an appetite for change—and beyond that: the *awareness* of change? The ancients had an idea of the past and by it they judged the changes of the present; moderns have an idea of change and by it they judge the past and the present. That awareness has another name: *misfortune*. It is the stamp that the elect bear graven on their foreheads and summed up in it are the bizarre, the irregular, and the out-of-shape, all of the attributes of modern beauty. The sign of modernity is a stigma: presence wounded by time, tattooed by death.

In antiquity, with pagan destiny or Christian providence, man could not escape eternity; modern man is condemned to the now, to instability. There is no rest. It does not matter: there is an instant in which time, since it can no longer stop, turns on itself; an instant not outside of time but previous to history, and the *reverse* of the present. It is the original instant, and in it modernity is discovered as an antiquity without dates: the time of the savage. By destroying the idea of eternal beauty, modernity has opened the gates of the world to the barbarians: the most modern art will thus be the most ancient. Hence the greatness of Delacroix: his painting is "cannibal art." With a kind of furious enthusiasm, Baudelaire exalts the "savagery" of the painter, his affinity with the Aztec priest and his obsidian knife, the destructive and "Molochist" character of his work, like a "triumphal hymn" to fire. The splotches of color in Delacroix arouse in the spirit the ferocity of certain tropical sunsets, the coating of warm ashes on ruins. . . . But the original instant does not hold time back: it is the other face of the present, just as barbarism is the inverse of civilization. Prisoners of their relationship, one depends

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upon the other: what is savage is simply a point of view of the civilized. Furthermore, as the descendants of Baudelaire would hasten to prove, "savagery" is no less diverse than modernity: there are as many artistic styles as there are primitive societies. Therefore savagery is another mirage of modernity. At the same time—and hence its effectiveness—it is a criticism of modernity. Savagery, modernity, and tradition are manifestations of the critical art, that is to say, of polemical and historical art. By introducing the notions of modernity and savagery into art, Baudelaire was inserting criticism into creation, he was inventing the critical art. Previously criticism came before or after the creation; now it accompanies it and is, one might say, a condition of it. In the same way in which criticism becomes creative by analogy, creation is also critical by being historical. In a constant struggle with the past, modern art is in a struggle with itself. The art of our time lives and dies because of modernity.

Equally from the perspective of language as from that of history, Baudelaire's reflection results in an unsustainable paradox and one which, nevertheless, is the very reality of modern painting: the triumph of the pictorial is the equivalent of the disincarnation of presence, the victory of modernity is its ruin, the original instant does not dissolve but rather affirms history, the esthetic of the particular denies itself and the creative accident is converted into a mechanical repetition. Torn by the enmity of contraries, Baudelaire seeks in analogy a system that, without suppressing tensions, resolves them in concert. Analogy is the highest function of the imagination because it already conjugates analysis and synthesis, translation and creation. It is knowledge and at the same time a transmutation of reality. On the one side, it is an arch that joins different periods and civilizations; on the other a bridge between different languages: poetry, music, painting. On the first, if it is not "the eternal," it is that which articulates all times and spaces into an image that as it ceaselessly changes is prolonged and perpetuated. On the second it converts communication into creation: what painting says without speaking is transformed into what music paints without painting, and what the poetical word enunciates without ever mentioning expressly. The difference from the older form of analogy lies in the following: the medieval artist possessed a universe of signs shared by all and governed by a single key, the Holy Book; the

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modern artist has at hand a repertory of heterogeneous signs, and instead of sacred scripture he is faced with a multitude of contradictory books and traditions. Therefore, the modern analogy also flows into the dispersion of meaning. Analogical translation is a metaphor in rotation which engenders another metaphor, which in turn provokes another and another: what do all those metaphors say? Nothing that has not already been said in painting: presence is hidden as long as the sense is dissolved.

In many of his poems and critical reflections Baudelaire has said in an unmistakable way what the *final meaning* of analogy is. Particularly explicit are the pages he dedicates to the music of Wagner. More than a reflection on analogy, those pages relate a unique experience, one which cannot be called anything but: the *disincarnation of presence*. On listening to the overture to *Lohengrin,* the poet feels unchained from the *"liens de la pesanteur,"* so that, moved by the music, he finds himself in a *"solitude avec un immense horizon et une large lumière diffuse; l'immensité sans autre décor qu'elle-même. Bientôt j'éprouvai la sensation d'une clarté plus vive, d'une intensité de lumière croissant avec une telle rapidité que les nuances fournies par le dictionnaire ne suffiraient pas à exprimer ce surcroît toujours renaissant d'ardeur et de blancheur. Alors je conçus pleinement l'idée d'une âme se mouvant dans un milieu lumineux, d'une extase faite de volupté et de connaissance. . . ."* The feelings of height and voluptuousness are tightly associated with those of loss of the body and that white light which is the abolition of all colors. Empty of himself, his being reposes in an immensity that contains nothing but itself. Time and again the notion of time is transformed into that of a space that extends *"jusqu'aux limites du concevable."* A frontier experience: space extends itself so far that it really is invisible and inconceivable: non-space, non-time. And that nullification is the ecstasy of knowledge: sunken in floating space, the poet becomes separated from his identity and blends with the empty expanse. The critical art culminates in a final negation: Baudelaire is contemplating, literally, *nothing*. Rather: he is contemplating a metaphor of nothingness. A transparency which, even if it hides nothing, does not reflect anything either—not even its questioning face. The esthetic of the analogy is, like the others, an esthetic of the nullification of presence.

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Baudelaire's thought endows almost all artistic movements of our time, from impressionism down to the present, with a critical and esthetic awareness. The idea of painting as an autonomous and self-sufficient language has been shared by the majority of artists of our time and has been the basis of abstract painting. The same thing might be said of the value of the word modernity, polemical and magical at the same time, and its successors: new, vanguard (although Baudelaire did not hide his distaste for the last term). It is scarcely worth the effort to remember that a constant note in modern art has been the use of procedures and styles farther and farther removed from Renaissance and Greco-Roman tradition, running the gamut from Negro to Pre-Columbian art, and from infantile painting to that by schizophrenics: a plurality of the ideas of beauty. The preeminence of spontaneity, the communication between being awake and dreaming, the nostalgia of a word lost in the origin of times and the exaltation of infancy are themes which reappear in impressionism, surrealism, and abstract expressionism. The reduction of beauty to the singular, the characteristic, the shapeless: expressionism. The creative function of analogy, the esthetic of surprise. . . .

In a certain way it could be said that modern art has fulfilled Baudelaire's ideas. It could also be legitimate to say that it has proved him wrong. The two affirmations are not mutually exclusive; rather, they are complementary: the situation today is as much a negation of that of 1860 as it is a result. In recent decades the acceleration of changes has been such that it has been practically the same as a refutation of change: immobility and repetition. The same thing happens with the production of ever more numerous works which pretend to be exceptional and unique: apart from the fact that most are the product of industrious imitation and not of imagination, in their totality they give the feeling of the coming together in great quantities of diverse objects—the collecting of debris. Marcel Duchamp wonders: *"nous sommes devant un océan de tableaux. . . . Où sont les greniers qui pourront les contenir? Où sont les caves?"* Modernity ends up by denying itself: the vanguard today is repeating the gests and gestures of that of 1917. We are living out the end of the idea of modern art. Therefore, the first thing that artists and critics must do is

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apply to that idea the rigorous criticism that Baudelaire made of the idea of tradition.

The esthetic of modernity is contemporary to certain changes in the production, distribution, and evaluation of works. The autonomy of painting—its separation from the other plastic arts and its pretension of constituting in itself a self-sufficient language—is parallel to the birth of the museum, the commercial gallery, the professional critic, and the collector. It is a movement which, as we all know, begins in the Renaissance and whose high point coincides with that of capitalism and free trade. The same thing must be said about the evolution of the forms of artistic production, from the workshops of the Renaissance and the baroque period to the individual producer of our times. But what I am interested in pointing out is a double phenomenon: on the one hand, paintings have ceased to belong to a system of common meanings and beliefs and have become, more and more, individual expressions which tend to satisfy consumers who are also individuals; on the other hand, removed from the old collective space, church or palace, they stand by themselves in autonomous space. In the spiritual and social sense, as in the material, pictures have become transportable objects. This circumstance has facilitated their entry into mercantile circulation. An ambivalence of a painting: it is art, a unique object; it is merchandise, something that we can transport and hang on this or that wall. Nothing more natural than that a society which worships things and has made economic exchange the highest form of communication, should build museums and increase private collections: they are the counterparts of banks and warehouses. A fetishism for things is different from the idolatry of images. The first is a passion of an owner who is the slave of what he possesses, independently of the meaning of the object; the second is a religious passion for what the object represents. Works of art are unique but, at the same time, they are exchangeable: they can be sold; idols are neither unique nor exchangeable: an image can be exchanged for another only by means of an appropriate ritual. Our society exalts the painter and his works as a condition of transforming them into objects of exchange.

Criticism of the esthetic of modernity demands equally a criticism of the market-place and the magical-mercantile character

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of the work. Time and again artists have rebelled against this situation. Dadaism undermined the notion of a work and showed the ridiculous character of the cult of art; surrealism revived the image and devaluated the pictorial. Nevertheless, ready-mades by Duchamp and visions of Ernst and Miró are found in museums. In recent years, from a different perspective, other young artists have been making attempts to escape from the prison of the market-place. Among these attempts, because of the radicalism of their program, I would like to single out the *Groupe de recherche d'art visuel.* These artists have dared to go into the bull's territory, as followers of bullfighting would say. Or: they attack the system at its roots. In the first place, they are returning to group work. Baudelaire, facing the spectacle of hundreds of painters in search of an impossible and in the end inane originality, has already pointed out that it would be better for them to work honorably in the studio of a master. Painting would also gain: *"Une large production est une pensée à mille bras."* The *Groupe de recherche d'art visuel* replaces the workshop with the laboratory, artistic production with research, the idea of master and pupil with an association of artists, and it places in the center of its concerns that *thought* of which Baudelaire speaks and which is nothing else but another name for imagination. An end to the superstition of the *"métier": "Celui qui ne possède que l'habilité est une bête."* An end to the fanaticism of the unique thing, as much through the multiplication of models of each work as through the fact that each one of these is an object which invites us to contemplate it and transform it. An end to the idea of a spectator in favor of that of the creative game: the *Groupe* proposes situations which provoke the collective reaction of the participants. The work dissolves in life but life is resolved in the festival. This word immediately evokes one of the myths of modernity: Baudelaire's savage, Breton's "man in the distance." Except that now it is not a question of returning to the art of the primitives or reviving their beliefs, but of finding, thanks precisely to our machines, a collective way of consuming and consummating time. Le Parc has said that a painting lasts as long as a look. It is true if that look is a sign of intelligence that we exchange with the work. . . . I do not know whether the products of the *Groupe* will end up in museums like those of their

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predecessors. It is most likely. It does not matter: I have mentioned the attempt of these young artists because their program seems to me to be a symptom, among others, of the disappearance of the "idea of modernity," as Baudelaire and his successors, from the impressionists to the abstract painters, conceived of it. I am certain that we are witnessing the end of the *objet d'art* and that of the concept of art as a mere production of objects. The notion of substance is breaking up, not only in contemporary physics and philosophy, but even in the world of economics: the value of use is replacing more and more the value of the durable thing. I will say, finally, that my idea of the festival differs from that proposed to us by these young artists. The festival that I dream of would not only be a sharing and consummation of the object, but, unlike among the primitives, *it would have no object:* neither the commemoration of a date nor a return to original time, it would be—one must struggle with language in order to say it—a dissipation of time, a *production of oblivion. . .*

The revival of the festival is one of the *outcomes* of contemporary art, in the realm of the visual arts as in that of the aural and verbal: a dissolution of the artistic thing into the temporal current and the crystallization of historic time in a closed space. The festival suppresses, for an instant, the opposition between presence and representation, the atemporal and the historical, the sign and the object signified. It is a presentation but it is at the same time a consummation: the presence takes on flesh only to be divided and consumed among the guests. Thus ends, at one extreme, the quarrel between the eternal and the transitory. But out of the ashes of the festival is reborn the discord between the pictorial and the metapictorial. Is there another route? Groping and guided by the principle of analogy, which is also that of complementary opposition, I shall venture a hypothesis: the other pole of the festival is contemplation. If the first satisfies a lack in our mass society, the second satisfies another in our society of solitaries. The art of contemplation produces objects but does not consider them things but signs: starting points in the direction of the discovery of another reality, whether it be presence or emptiness. I have written *in the direction of the discovery* because in a society like ours art does not offer significations or representations: it is an art in search of signification. In

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search of presence or absence, the opposite of a thing signified. This art of contemplation would redeem the notion of a *work,* except that instead of seeing an object in it, a thing, it would be given back its true function: that of being a *bridge* between the viewer and that presence to which art always alludes without ever naming it completely. After more than a hundred years of modernity, our situation is similar to that of a character in *Kantan,* the *Nô* play admirably translated by Waley: a young traveler puts up at an inn and, fatigued by his journey, lies down on a mat; while the hostess prepares him a handful of rice, he dreams that he ascends to the throne of China and that he lives, *as if he were immortal,* through fifty years of glory: the few minutes that it took the rice to cook and for him to wake up. Like the Buddhist traveler, we might ask ourselves: has anything changed? If we answer: nothing has changed, because all changes are made of the substance of the dream, we will be affirming implicitly that we have changed. Before having that dream we would not have been able to answer in that way; in order to know that changes are fanciful, we must change. If we answer in the affirmative, we also fall into a contradiction: our change consists of our realizing that all changes are illusory, including our own. Art and criticism in the twentieth century have existed as prisoners of this paradox. Perhaps the only answer would be not to ask the question, to rise up and start out again in search of the presence, not as if nothing had happened but as if there had happened—nothing.

[*Translated by Gregory Rabassa*]

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JOHN FREDERICK NIMS

Goethe: Trilogy of Passion

TO WERTHER

So once again, poor tear-bedabbled shadow,
You venture in the light of day?
And here, in blossoms of the fresher meadow,
Confront me and not turn away?
Alive as in the early dawn, when tender
Chill of a misty field bestirred the two,
When both were dazzled by the west in splendor
After the drudging summer days were through.
My doom: endure. And yours: depart forlorn.
Is early death, we wonder, much to mourn?

In theory how magnificent, man's fate!
The day agreeable, the night so great.
Yet we, in such a paradise begun,
Enjoy but briefly the amazing sun,
And then the battle's on: vague causes found
To struggle with ourself, the world around.
Neither completes the other as it should:
The skies are gloomy when our humor's good;
The vista glitters and we're glum enough.
Joy near at hand, but we—at blindman's buff.

At times we think it ours: some darling girl!
Borne on a fragrant whirlwind, off we whirl.
The young man, breezy as in boyhood's prime,
Like spring itself goes strutting in springtime.
Astounded, charmed, "Who's doing this, all for me?"
Claims like a cocky heir the land and sea.
Goes footloose anywhere, without a thought;
No wall, no palace holds him, even if caught.
As swallows skim the treetops in a blur,

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He hovers round, in rings, that certain her.
Scans, from the height he means to leave at last,
Earth for an answering gaze, that holds him fast.

First warned too soon, and then too late, he'll swear
His feet are bound, traps planted everywhere.
Sweet meetings are a joy, departure's pain.
Meeting again—what hopes we entertain!
Moments with her make good the years away.
Yet there's a treacherous parting, come the day.

You smile, my friend, eyes welling. Still the same!
Yours, what a ghastly avenue of fame.
We dressed in mourning when your luck ran out
And you deserted, leaving ours in doubt.
For us, the road resuming God knows where,
Through labyrinths of passion, heavy air,
Still drew us on, bone-tired, with desperate breath
Up to a final parting. Parting's death!
True: it's affecting when the poets sing
Willow or such, to sweeten suffering.
Some god—though man's half guilty, hurt past cure—
Grant him a tongue to murmur: I endure.

ELEGY

Though most men suffer dumbly, yet a god
Gave me a tongue to utter all my pain.

What's to be hoped from seeing her again?
Hoped from the still-shut blossoms of today?
Which opens, heaven or hell, around me? When
I guess, my thoughts go wandering every way.
But steady—there! She's there, at heaven's door;
Her arms enfold and raise me, as before.

So then the heavens are open, take me in
As if deserving life forever blest.

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No wish, no longing, and no might-have-been
Stinted: the very goal of all my quest.
Eyes dwell delighted on that loveliest thing,
Their tears subsiding at the passionate spring.

Didn't the day go by on flashing feathers!
Didn't it send the minutes skimming there!
Our sign, the kiss at evening—and what weathers
It promised: fair tonight, tomorrow fair.
Hours were like sisters, lingering as they passed,
Each face alike, each different from the last.

Our final kiss, so shuddering sweet, it tore
The sheerest of all fiber, heart's desire.
My foot, abrupt or dragging, dodged her door
As if an angel waved that sword of fire.
Eyes frozen on the dusky ruts go glum.
Turn, and her door's a darkness, shut and dumb.

My soul's a darkness, shut and dumb—as though
This heart had never opened, never found
Hours of delight beside her, such a glow
As all the stars of heaven let dance around.
Now gloom, remorse, self-mockery—clouds of care
Clutch at it, sluggish, in the sluggish air.

What of the world—it's done for? Cliffs of granite
Crowned shadowy with the sacred grove—they're vapor?
No harvest-moon? Green delta country (can it?)
Turn with its trees to ash, like burning paper?
That grandeur curved above us—all undone?—
Now with its thousand clouds, and now with none.

A form there!—rare and airy, silken, bright,
Floats forth, among the clouds in grave ballet,
An angel in blue noon, or—? No, a white
Slim body—hers!—inclining far away.
You saw her lean so at the gala ball;
Among the loveliest, lovelier far than all.

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A ruse for moments only. Don't suppose
The empty air a match for her embraces.
Back to your heart of hearts, that better knows
Her and the changing miracle her face is.
In every guise she's greater. Like a flame,
Forever varying and the very same.

Once by the gate she waited; in she brought me;
Onward from joy to keener joy we passed.
The last last kiss—but how she ran and caught me,
Pressed to my mouth an even laster last.
Still that indelible image of desire
Burns on my heart in script of living fire—

My heart (its battlement a height securing
Her for itself alone, itself for her)
Only for her is happy in enduring;
Knows it has life by stirring if she stir.
Confined in love, is free and on its own;
Praising, with each pulsation, her alone,

Because: when dead to love, and hardly caring
Whether another's love could sink or save it
—She came. And my old verve in dreaming, daring,
Resolving, up-and-doing—this she gave it.
If ever love restored a human soul,
It took my shrunken self and made it whole.

And all through her! In mind and body's gloom
I mooned lugubrious, lurching and agrope.
Look where I would, saw shuddering visions loom
Over the heart's eroded acres. Hope
—Suddenly, out of hopelessness—was there:
A girl with the light of morning on her hair.

To God's own peace, the peace that here below
Passeth all understanding (so the preacher)
I'm minded to compare that heady glow

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Of fervor, being near a certain creature.
The heart's at ease; not one distraction blurs
That deepest sense, the sense of *wholly hers.*

In the pure ocean of the soul, a comber
Flings itself, out of thankfulness, self-giving,
Toward something Purer, Higher—Grand Misnomer
However named—to approach the ever-living.
We call it, *being reverent.* And its flight
Sweeps me, when I'm beside her, height to height.

Before her gaze, like sun where winter lingers,
Before her breathing, like the stir of May,
Self-love, that steely ice that digs its fingers
Deep in our rigid psyche, melts away.
No self-concern, no self-importance where
She sets a foot. They squirm away, that pair.

As if I heard her, urgent: "Hour by hour
Life gives itself, exuberant, unbidden.
Yesterday's meaning is a withered flower;
Tomorrow!—who can live there? Where's it hidden?
Today though—if I quailed with sunset near
Never a sun but showed me something dear.

"Then do as I do: Look with knowing pride
Each moment in the face. But no evasion!
Keep every nerve a-tingle! Open-eyed
Rush to it all: day's effort, love's elation.
But where you are, be wholly. Be a child.
You're *all* then. Undefeatable," she smiled.

Easy, I thought, for you to say! Some grace
Shows you forever as the moment's friend.
Anyone near you for a moment's space
Is fortune's favorite—till the moment end.
As end it does! In panic I depart:
You and your pretty wisdom break the heart!

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Now miles and miles between us. If I could,
How should I live this minute? Who's to say?
It offers much desirable and good
—All like a shabby pack to shrug away.
Invincible longing dogs me as I go.
Tears are the one philosophy I know.

So let them have their way now, unrepressed.
No chance they'll damp the furnaces within.
Embattled there, all's berserk in my breast
With life and death locked grisly. Which to win?
Herbs dull our suffering when the body's ill,
But if the soul lack nerve, lack even will—?

Or worse, lack understanding? Years without her!
Whose image haunts me in a thousand ways.
Sun on her hair, the falling dusk about her—
The memories lag, or dwindle off in haze.
What good's all this? What comfort? shaken so
By all this coming, going, ebb and flow?

*

Well, leave me here, companions (or I bore you),
Here on the moor alone, with rocks and moss.
You, ever onward, upward! All's before you,
The whole wide earth, the heaven so broad across!
Make your investigations, scour and scout.
Nature has clues to shuffle and sort out.

All's lost to me. Myself lost. Now ignore a
Man the gods coddled with a "lucky star"!
They put me to the proof with that Pandora
So rich in gifts, in havoc richer far.
They pressed me to sweet lips that gave and gave;
Then crushed and flung me headlong. Toward the grave.

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RECONCILIATION

Passion, and then the anguish. And with whom
To soothe you, heavy heart that lost so much?
Love's hour escaped, unstoppered like perfume?
The loveliest—all for nothing—within touch?
Cloudy the mind; mere muddle all it tries.
And the great world adrift before the eyes.

Then music to the fore like angels swarming,
A million tones in galaxy. We surrender
All of our inner fort to forces storming
—Irresistibly overrun with splendor.
The eye goes damp: in longings past tomorrow
We guess at the infinite worth of song and sorrow.

And so the heart, disburdened, in a flash
Knows: I endure, and beat, and pound with pleasure!
Gives itself over utterly, in rash
Thanks for the windfall, life. No common treasure.
Yearns: could it only last!—our feeling of
Fortune on fortune doubled, song and love.

Translator's Note: In 1824, fifty years after he had published *Die Leiden des jungen Werther,* Goethe evoked, in the first part of the *Trilogy,* the ghost of the sentimental young man who had killed himself for love. Goethe himself had recently had a Werther-experience of his own: at the age of 74 he had fallen wildly in love with the pretty teen-ager Ulrike von Levetzow at Marienbad. The second part of the *Trilogy,* sometimes called the *Marienbad Elegy,* is about their last day together and its memories. His sense of loss and despair is resolved, in the third part, by the power of music, through which he feels we may guess at the splendor of some ultimate unity beyond the broken notes of earth.

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CALVIN BEDIENT

Middlemarch: Touching Down

LIKE ALL EXAMPLES OF LITERARY realism, *Middlemarch* belongs to the negative province of the mind, where greatness is attained through renunciation. Its imaginative asceticism, its discipline of seeing, are heroic. And in this renunciation lies its essential virtue. Having submitted herself to reality in this book the way a pool submits to the sky, George Eliot achieved the bare beauty of veracity. *Middlemarch* is not merely the Everest of English realism; it is the epitome of realism itself.

And this is to say that, of all English novels, *Middlemarch* is the most novelistic. Here let me refer to José Ortega y Gasset's neglected "Short Treatise on the Novel."[1] The theme of the novel—Ortega skillfully argues—is the "collapse of the poetic," the final "insufficiency . . . of culture, of all that is noble, clear, lofty." And thus "every novel bears *Quixote* within it like an inner filigree." Now, if this is true, neither *Tom Jones* nor *Women in Love* is a novel. "How parochial, how academic," we may think. Nonetheless, chances are that Ortega catches us with our theory down and embarrassed for an answer. For if we excuse ourselves from holding any theory, it is a theory of the novel. And certainly the novel, which jerks about from fact to fantasy like an animal in a bag, hardly permits us to hold an idea of it. Perhaps the novel, moreover, is best regarded as an attempt to supersede genre altogether: to be, or be equal to, everything. And of course Ortega, while attacking the realistic novel, paid it an enormous compliment when he assumed that it was the only novel. All the same, insofar as the novel does possess a distinctive identity, Ortega is boldly right. The "original impulse" of the novel, the impulse of which it is "the explanation, development and fulfillment," is the impulse to touch ground: to know things as they are.

1 Originally published in English in THE HUDSON REVIEW, Vol. X, No. 1 (Spring, 1957), under the title "The Nature of the Novel." Reprinted under the title "First Meditation: A Short Treatise on the Novel" in *Meditations on Quixote* (The Norton Library, 1963).

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It is this impulse—elaborated with classical purity—that gives *Middlemarch* its pre-eminence among English novels. Beside it, the rest of English fiction appears—fictitious. And this is true even of books that also bear *Quixote* within them: by comparison, for instance, *Great Expectations* is half fairy tale, and *Vanity Fair* a spree of humor and style. These and other works are rich in imagination; *Middlemarch* is rich in reality. It is, in effect, all vehicle, all medium, all transparency: dead to itself. And this must be said in the face of the vast formal mining to which the novel has been subjected. Indeed, there is something unreal, misjudged, and supererogatory about this activity. It is a little like counting change in Fort Knox.[2] For what does it matter, after all, that *Middlemarch* contains sharp contrasts, summary metaphors, stitches of imagery—numerous devices? The thing to be noted is that, like chameleons, these are merged in the color of their subject. To the natural gaze, *Middlemarch* wears no aesthetic garment, only the hair shirt of the world. The book embodies a kind of aesthetic humility; and this is integral to its mastery and achievement.

That this novel was written at all is one of the miracles of art. For though no one but George Eliot could ever have written it, how strange and wonderful it is, nonetheless, that, being who she was, she was able to write it. The nerve and honesty that it must have required would be hard to overestimate. In *Middlemarch,* George Eliot transcended herself, heroically. Nothing in her other novels prepares us for its strong achievement. Compared to *Middlemarch,* they all seem ingrown and self-indulgent. Restagings of the author's traumatic separations from family and society, they are not so much novels as therapeutic parables of revolt and submission. In each George Eliot vicariously reenters, with sobs of gratitude, the coffin of her childhood, of filial and social duty; in each the self is displaced by "others." They amount to little more than scriptures in a religion of home, nation, and tradition, they float in an unexamined sentiment of social sanctity. Bent as they are to a predetermined end, they not only lack freedom as novels; they also portray repeatedly, and as a supposedly edifying spectacle, the surrender of personal freedom.

[2] See, for example, *Middlemarch: Critical Approaches to the Novel,* ed. by Barbara Hardy (Oxford University Press, 1967), where, in the essays by Derek Oldfield, Hilda M. Hulme, and Barbara Hardy, formal analysis moves into the smallest veins of the book. Mark Schorer's well-known emphasis on metaphor, here continued in an essay called "Method, Metaphor and Mind," is another case in point.

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It is far from my intention to claim that nothing can be said for these novels. On the contrary, a great deal can be said. *The Mill on the Floss* is fine and impressive, *Silas Marner* is a minor masterpiece, the first third of *Daniel Deronda* is brilliant, *Adam Bede* has considerable charm. Nonetheless, to one degree or another, all suffer from the author's characteristic limitations—her hysterical fear of egoism, her consequent sentimentality about altruism, her craven dependence upon the past, her often morbid preoccupation with duty, and that slightly fetid atmosphere of moral and maternal solicitude with which she surrounds her weak and wounded. These books, appealing to a complicity that no longer exists, have been left exposed and ineffectual by the shifting of the tides.

Middlemarch, by contrast, still exercises considerable power, still tells for its whole amount. It lives by reason of its naturalism, and because its naturalism addresses, not our weaknesses, but our intelligence. *Middlemarch* alone among George Eliot's novels was written out of her own full intelligence. In it she tells us all that she knew; for the first and last time, she is a perfect naturalist of the self and of society, and not just for a chapter or two, but the entire length of a novel. Here she hides nothing from herself; she is as large as the truth, even though the truth is dreadful and dispiriting. In *Middlemarch* she does not impose a scheme, she reveals a condition. To be sure, here she is as preoccupied as ever with the nobility, the necessity, the painful difficulty of living for others. But in this instance the theme is scribbled over by life. Where in her other books George Eliot's desire for community burns and consumes the realism, in *Middlemarch* it is her desire that burns, and reality is the fire. And yet not for a moment does she lose her self-possession. Standing off to the side, she lets her sanctities fare as they can—which is very poorly indeed. And it is this unexpected detachment, this impersonality, this freedom and hardness of observation, that makes *Middlemarch,* everything considered, a creative miracle.

And having stepped out of herself, having performed that self-abdication that her novels themselves always urge upon the reader, she begins to see. Nothing whatever is lost on her. She is all passionate and stunning attention. Provincial society as a field of "spiritual falls"—this subject she examines with the rigor of a

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physicist. Her concentration is magnificent. The impulse to discover the truth establishes itself, steely and relentless, from the first page, and, except for a passage or two, is present in every prosaic and honest line. To be sure, George Eliot's contrary tendency to delude herself about the ascendancy of altruism and the sacredness of society persists even here. But the important thing is that in *Middlemarch* it stands at bay. It falters, it cannot find its voice. And, remarkably, George Eliot now finds herself lamenting the very things she has hitherto enshrined: the tyranny of "others," the inertia of the past, the insignificance of the self. For the first and only time she confronts honestly, and with great disquietude, the implications of her own strongest allegiances. And for this reason *Middlemarch* is the only novel of George Eliot's that we can trust. Reading it, we are not forced to discount the author and her noble, her compulsive illusions. For here she is exposing, not so much her own faiths and needs, as was her habit, but the truth about the "embroiled" medium of social life and about the inherent illness and the weedy persistence of the ego—essential truths about both man and his social world. Here, triumphantly, she is a novelist.

The poetry of the other novels is the pale poetry of romance; the poetry of *Middlemarch,* the tragic poetry of realism. The other novels assert the high sufficiency of altruism, of society as some "divinely-guided whole," of aspiration to the "Right." And with the significant exception of those in which the heroine closely resembles the novelist—*Romola* and *The Mill on the Floss* —they "lay the axe to the root," namely the ego, with a good deal of righteous complacency. But in *Middlemarch* the ego is not so easily dismissed. Nor does the "sufficiency" of all that is sacred and lofty survive inspection. *Middlemarch* describes the fall of that poetry which, in the other novels, floats on undisturbed, spectral and silvery, like clouds piled in twilight. And in this fall *Middlemarch* finds its own kind of poetry—the poetry special to the novel as a genre: the poetry of realism.

The "poetry" that collapses in *Middlemarch* is, in part, that myth and product of the nineteenth century, the deification of society. The ordinary George Eliot shared with Ruskin the belief that "the noblest word in the catalogue of social virtue is 'Loyalty,' and the sweetest which men have learned in the pastures of

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the wilderness is 'Fold.' " Indeed, to her, loyalty to the fold constituted that "binding belief or spiritual law, which is to lift us into willing obedience and save us from the slavery of unregulated passion." Her early religious faith, having broken, had been scraped together and erected into a "social faith," which, for all that, was nonetheless a genuine faith. To die to oneself and live for others; to be governed always by the "reliance others have in us"; to reverence every society as a kind of sacred organism: these were the essential practices of her faith—a faith of which her protagonists formed the priesthood, the saints. These last, finding themselves not only problematical but "insignificant," invariably live for others. And yet never does it occur to them that, if they are indeed insignificant, the "others"—so frankly presented as their inferiors—must be insignificant too. But in *Middlemarch*—and here lies the key to its difference from the other novels—the insignificance of the "others" obtrudes itself. It dominates; it is dreadful.

In this "Study of Provincial Life," George Eliot steps into a trap formed by both her purpose and her subject. Inadvisably, she "studies" the fold—and, closely examined at last, how dismaying it is. How it bleats and shoves as—ah, can it be?—it tramples her hero, Lydgate, and suffocates her heroine, Dorothea. This Middlemarch with its "hampering threadlike pressure of small social conditions," where men are "shapen after the average and fit to be packed by the gross"—this Middlemarch is not a sacred cause but a menace. Impossible to exalt it. Impossible to speak of it in reverential tones. For what is the community of Middlemarch, after all, but the electric accumulation of the petty self-interest of its inhabitants? And let a window open on the "larger" world in this novel, and it discloses another Middlemarch.[3] Thus it is that, finally caught in a harsh light in George Eliot, the iridescent mist of the "We" evaporates. And what lies bared, in the form of the community itself, resembles nothing so much as that ego from which George Eliot had always been fleeing.

[3] The young doctor Lydgate has come to the provinces—and of course there is hard irony in this—to avoid "London intrigues, jealousies, and social truckling." Nor does idealism fare better abroad. There is a lesson in Trawley, who shared Lydgate's apartment in Paris. At that time "he was hot on the French social systems, and talked of going to the Backwoods to found a sort of Pythagorean community." At the present time of the novel, however, "he is practising at a German bath, and has married a rich patient." In *Middlemarch,* no matter where you live, "you have," as Farebrother says, "not only got the old Adam in yourself against you, but . . . all those descendants of the original Adam who form the society around you."

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The community of Middlemarch is characterized by precisely those qualities that, according to Ortega, define brute actuality in *Don Quixote:* stubborn presence, heaviness, inertia. The explanation for this is that, by epitomizing the plebeian, Middlemarch represents the "real" element in society. As Georg Simmel observed, the center of gravity in society lies somewhere near the lowest common denominator of its members—it is our most primitive desires that drive us into association with others. Just where it begins to gain mass, then, the collective is irremediably plebeian. And, consequently, on all that is new and rare and individual, society exerts a constant force of gravitation. Now, as a novelist, Goerge Eliot was habitually opposed to the individual and the new, if not to the excellent and the rare. But in *Middlemarch* she is forced at last to acknowledge that "it seems as if the paltry fellows were always to turn the scale." She becomes a champion of progress and excellence. The "social" now wears the aspect of the primitive. Far from being a guide, as before, it is society itself that now stands in need of guidance.

But in Middlemarch the superior few not only prove too light to deflect its course; they themselves are sucked into the orbit of the plebeian. And in large part it is the sorrow of their fall that gives the novel its realistic poetry—its disillusioned poignancy and impact. This sorrow consists in the collapse, on the one hand, of the putative divinity of society and, on the other, of George Eliot's most guardedly intimate and heartfelt theme—what in *The Mill on the Floss* is called "the poetry of ambition." And these mirages were doomed to vanish together; for to George Eliot the only conceivable object of "poetic" ambition was a sacred collective. In consequence, having laid bare in *Middlemarch* the social as the unredeemed, she stands bewildered; and Duty, Sacrifice, Aspiration, Achievement—all that great fleet of the century—lie becalmed. That heroic aspiration might fail, that a noble sacrifice might be resisted, that the crowd is not at all eager to welcome, to adore, to understand the hero—this seems to strike her with the force of a blow. Always before, in her novels, noble achievement had seemed so easy; and it was to seem so again in *Daniel Deronda.* But *Middlemarch* makes the discovery of the age—of Comte, Darwin, Marx—that the environment is the

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only protagonist. Here, dismally, the community seeps into the noble characters and gradually fills them with itself—though Lydgate, who slips from the heights of medical research to the depths of fashionable practice, is, it is true, the only thorough example of this. The "blight of irony" cast over "all higher effort" is thus the conscious burden of the novel.

Yet, fundamental as it is, the irony of aspiration, the failure of higher effort, is not in itself the grievance that runs like a ground hum through the book. It is only the circumstance of a grievance still more profound. Contrary to George Eliot's own assumptions, aspiration is never a purely disinterested motive; it is always driven by, it always serves, the ego, which thereby seeks to overcome its suspicion of its own insignificance. But in *Middlemarch* this suspicion is not successfully overcome; on the contrary, everything increases it. And hence it is that, heard at its deepest, *Middlemarch* is a prolonged protest of the dissatisfied ego, a lamentation on the darkness of life without fame.

It is this egoistic dissatisfaction that accounts for the deep sadness of the book. No one knew so well the melancholy wastes of a sense of personal inconsequence as this famous, highly influential novelist. The isolation, the unhappiness of her youth had taught her to believe that life without ambition, without fame, was unendurable. When, late in her life, she was urged to write an autobiography, she replied: "The only thing I should care much to dwell on would be the absolute despair I suffered from of ever being able to achieve anything. No one could ever have felt greater despair. . . ." Her loneliness, her ugliness, her liaison with Lewes, were wounds that no amount of fame could ever heal; and yet only fame could ever heal them. And thus her yearning for glory was sharp and insatiable; she was helplessly and almost mindlessly in its spell. This Comtean apostle of selflessness, this emissary of "the others," was, in reality, the most self-anxious of the great Victorians. If, after becoming famous, she still entered provincial parlors and remembered the "unhistoric," she was, in part, engaged in a rescue mission, the object of which was herself. True, she liked to insist that "infinite issues" belong to humble, everyday duties; but what her heart told her, what her novels tell us, is that to be obscure is not to be. From Dinah Morris to Daniel Deronda, her heroes and heroines are impelled by one half-

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admitted desire: to be famously good. They would shine in the glory of their selflessness. To them, an illustrious achievement is not only visibility, or compensation for sacrifice; it is also the reservoir and guarantee of "significance." For what is life without aspiration? In words from *The Mill on the Floss:* "A narrow, ugly, grovelling existence, which even calamity does not elevate, but rather tends to exhibit in all its bare vulgarity of conception."

To George Eliot, then, nothing could be more calamitous than the collapse of aspiration. Not to aspire is to faint in obscurity—to pasture in the grass of a vulgar conception: that of human life itself. As a consequence, of the many causes for complaint in *Middlemarch,* the great if inarticulate cause is the ego's insolvency. The gray weather of the novel blows in from the coast of "naked, shivering" selves, from egos experiencing acutely their compulsory need for attention and esteem. In this connection, the decay of Christian therapy makes itself felt on every page, and in Farebrother the minister as much as in Ladislaw the aesthete. Unamuno is right: self-affirmation is the modern hysteria. Alien from its own creations—a loving God, eternity—the ego inhabits a shadow, Death and neglect. If in our day it fidgets, broods, strikes out, turns sour, complains, in George Eliot's time it buckled on its sword and rode out to conquer the world. But whether it asserts itself or collapses in vexation, its problem is the same. Having been emptied of its faiths, it finds itself once again at its starting point: that of a famished need for recognition. Where can it turn for corroboration, for nourishment, for vivification? If not to a loving God, then to love; if not to immortality, then to fame.

This feverish yearning for fame makes George Eliot our contemporary. The substitution of the good opinion of posterity for Christian immortality had been made by the eighteenth century Philosophers. But not until George Eliot did this post-Christian hunger force its way into the English novel. And then only to be all-consuming; it is the single, the almost secret source of whatever intensity her protagonists display. And nowhere is this hunger so naked, so uncontrolled, so like being under a possession, as in the Prelude to *Middlemarch.* Here, indeed, like an addict suddenly confronted by what he needs, George Eliot cannot help but betray her weakness—she speaks beyond embarrassment. If ever

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she had looked into *The Life of Saint Teresa of Avila,* to which the Prelude appears to refer, she had closed it as if dazed by glory. Snow-blinded, envious of a feminine name three hundred years old, she falsifies everything that she here recalls, evoking Teresa out of her own fantasies of fame. Thus where the real Teresa loved only one country, the Kingdom of God, the Teresa of the Prelude had, as a child, a heart "already beating to a national idea." Where the Teresa of the *Life* is clutching, even terrible with egoism, George Eliot's Teresa is an angel-minded inanity. In George Eliot's eyes, Teresa's life formed "a constant unfolding of far-resonant action." To the saint herself, however, life was a "disorderly farce," and this, it must be said, is what her conventual reform resembled. Moreover, nothing in this world seemed good to her except "its refusal to tolerate faults in good people, and its way of perfecting them by speaking ill of them." What was fame, what was the opinion of humanity to her? She was not of this earth, her home was elsewhere, her exile bitter. Why think of this Christian heroine at all in connection with the humanist, Dorothea? Because, whether she had wanted it or not, she won fame.

The Prelude, with its falsifications, is a vestige of the ordinary George Eliot. In the novel itself, her fascination with fame is dry, objective, dramatic: the designation "Study" is honestly earned. Having denied herself for so long, however, she cannot forego sentimental reflection in her Finale; and though her portrait of Dorothea has been clear, her final comment about it is confused. Contemplating her heroine, she is overcome by pathos. Somehow —she cannot say just how—Dorothea has been wronged. And the proof is that she has not won the fame of a Teresa. Generously indignant, George Eliot casts about as if for devils. And yet she does not know where to find them. Thus she throws out her net anew in the Finale of the manuscript, of the first edition, and of the Cheap edition of 1874; yet each time she fails to bring in a reality. To the charges of the manuscript version—of a "society which smiled on propositions of marriage from a sickly man to a girl less than half his own age" and, in general, self-interested behavior—she adds, in the first edition, the mis-education of women, and hypocrisy. But as reviewers of the novel observed, this indictment has no foundation in the novel itself. Helplessly and vaguely, George Eliot then reduced her criticism, in the second edition, to

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"the conditions of an imperfect social state." But even this, of course, is wide of the mark. Since Dorothea aspires above all to make the world a better place to live in, an imperfect social state is precisely her opportunity. And how, exactly, could a perfect social state have helped Dorothea? The answer seems to lie in the Prelude: ". . . these later-born Theresas were helped by no coherent social faith and order which could perform the function of knowledge for the ardently willing soul." But socially administered "knowledge," an "epic" life passed out like an assignment—this is not heroism, but servitude. And, once again, Teresa is hardly a relevant comparison; for Teresa acted not because faith and order were perfect, but in order to give them a perfection they lacked.

The truth is that Dorothea has scarcely any of the courage of a Saint Teresa. Like all George Eliot's heroines, she is weak in self-trust. It is Dorothea's diffidence, combined with the vagueness of her ambition, that accounts for her failure to lead an epic life—she allows her foolish uncle Mr. Brooke, and her conventional brother-in-law Sir James Chettam, to dissuade her from even somewhat less than "epic" actions, such as setting up a model village. In any case, what is the precise reason for the regret that George Eliot expresses in the Finale? Not, it seems, the waste of Dorothea's gifts—for the England she portrays cannot be said to be in great need of them. No, what George Eliot resents, what makes her strike out against phantoms, is Dorothea's lack of fame. Many who knew Dorothea, she remarks, "thought it a pity that so substantive and rare a creature should have been absorbed into the life of another, and be only known in a certain circle as wife and mother." To be only known in a certain circle! As wife and mother! The pangs, the emptiness, the comparative vulgarity of an unglorious life—it is this George Eliot regrets on Dorothea's behalf. Her pity flows unchecked and is almost palpable; for in Dorothea she sees her own worst fears enacted. Never will Dorothea's acts be classed as "historic," she will rest in an "unvisited" tomb: so the closing words of the novel remind us, as if pointing out some sad and impressive truth.

"There is no sorrow," Dorothea says, "I have thought about more than that—to love what is great, and try to reach it, and yet to fail." And whether or not we sympathize with her somewhat vacuous idealism, her disappointment is affecting. For we—like

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Dorothea, like the novelist herself—may also feel, indeed we are apt to feel, besieged by personal insignificance in an insignificant world, unconfirmed, unattended, yet anxious, withal, to prove ourselves equal to some unarticulated challenge. In any case, egoistic disappointment is not restricted, in *Middlemarch,* to Dorothea alone. It is multiplied throughout the characters. And it is this that gives the novel its powerful identity. Despite the openness of its realism, the book has a marked uniformity of mood. Everywhere there is an impression of abortion, a sense of eggshells downed by wind, a feeling of limbs lopped off. The effort —and failure—of self-monumentalization embraces almost the entire cast. Nearly every important character tries to carve his name on the world—to become as permanent as history, as significant as all mankind.

Dorothea's asset in this attempt on immortality is simply (no doubt too simply) her moral feeling. Indeed, Dorothea, like the novelist herself, has a genius for sympathy, which possesses her and makes her something of a monster. People only exist to her as "objects of rescue"—hence, not until Ladislaw has been treated unfairly does she feel that "sudden strange yearning of the heart." What she seeks in the realm of feeling is a kind of infinity of sympathy, an omnipotent goodness. For this reason, her actual accomplishments—the starting of a village school, and instrumentality in the building of certain cottages—count to her as nothing. Her dreams are grandiose; she would be as absolute as Providence: "I should like," she says, "to make life beautiful—I mean everybody's life." It is, as Lydgate reflects, "as if she wanted nothing for herself but a chair to sit in from which she can look down with those clear eyes at the poor mortals who pray to her." But great feeling cannot be monumentalized without great deeds, and, lacking these, Dorothea fails.

Will Ladislaw also attempts to vault into greatness through feeling—in his case, artistic sensibility, which gives him, he thinks, a "high individual value in the universe." Indeed, Will's conviction of having been summoned to "peculiar work" leaves him with so great a sense of personal significance that it threatens to keep him from doing any work at all. (Here the novelist treats him with a sympathetic irony.) But circumstances shake Will loose from his sense of his own high value—or perhaps we should say that George Eliot, rescuing him from the field of art, which is

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mined with immorality, converts him to the nobility of politics. But politics are also, after all, a field for glory, and once translated into them, Will not unexpectedly wonders why he should "not one day be lifted above the shoulders of the crowd, and feel that he had won that eminence well." In the end, however, the novelist, weathered and sober as a headstone, merely remarks that Will worked "well in those times when reforms were begun with a young hopefulness of immediate good which has been much checked in our days . . ."—how it falls, how it continues to fall, she seems to say, that rain of disappointment and insignificance.

By contrast to Ladislaw and Dorothea, Lydgate, the hopeful young doctor, and Casaubon, the aging scholar, seek to transcend insignificance through the mind. Each is engaged in, as we say, an "ambitious" investigation, the first in the field of biochemistry, the second in the field of mythography. And the reason they are willing to undertake so much is that, where the risk is great, the reward for success must be proportionate: they are speculators in fame. It is "final companionship with the immortals," "the prospect of living to future ages on earth" that drives them on. Yet, in keeping with the temper of the book, neither succeeds in making himself "stupendous"—Lydgate because of the old Adam in himself and others, Casaubon both because of his intellectual provinciality and because he procrastinates, his ego cowering before its own audacity.

For feeling and mind, Bulstrode the banker substitutes power. At once an "eminent Christian" and "prime minister" of Middlemarch, he plays both heaven and earth, Christian immortality and public renown, as a man might play two gaming tables simultaneously. And thus his ego aspires to walk the tightrope of its life insured. Like the other major characters, Bulstrode deliberately pursues a sense of high individual value; and because he really is superior, at least at the game of power, plebeian Middlemarch hounds him out, as it hounds out Lydgate and Dorothea.[4] And as

[4] "Locally and socially," writes J. M. S. Tompkins, "Dorothea does not belong to Middlemarch, and is not immersed in its atmosphere. Dorothea is county." (See "A Plea for Ancient Lights," *Middlemarch: Critical Approaches to the Novel.*) It is true that Dorothea is principally discouraged by Sir James Chettam and not by anyone in Middlemarch. But Sir James, in his entrenchment in tradition and in the prosaic, may be said to represent an extension of Middlemarch into the county. Indeed, "Middlemarch" is a ubiquitous element of provincial life, as Dorothea leads us to see when she complains of the social life of the county as "nothing but a labyrinth of petty courses, a walled-in maze of small paths that led nowhither."

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Bulstrode's ego, too, becomes abject, George Eliot extends even to him—to this man of criminally dishonest conscience—the powerful pathos she holds ready for those who fail to escape the conviction of personal nullity.

And then on through the list, to parodies and vulgarizations and lesser outbreaks of personal ambition. As to parody, there is Mr. Brooke, whose trivial "documents" are the comic counterparts of Casaubon's; like the scholar, Mr. Brooke only talks of doing something with them. As for vulgar ambition, there is, to begin with, Rosamond, Lydgate's wife, who strives for "that middle-class heaven, rank," and thus helps to destroy her husband's higher aspirations; then her brother Fred, who affects the life of a gentleman and banks on gaining Mr. Featherstone's property (Fred even practices the flute with "irrepressible hopefulness"); and Featherstone himself, who attempts to perpetuate his mean power beyond death, through his wills. And the hunger for prominence and permanence that we may see in these characters crops up even in the more self-effacing characters, like thistle through cement. Thus though mild Mr. Farebrother is forced to admit, "The world has been too strong for *me*. . . I shall never be a man of renown," he cannot resist publishing, in the "Twadler's Magazine," "small items about a variety of *Aphis Brassicae,* with," he ruefully adds, "the well-known signature of Philomicron." When plain and plain-living Mary Garth writes a little book for her boys, she has it "printed and published by Gripp & Co., Middlemarch." Nor does her humbly situated father, Caleb, escape the infection—like a slight fever, it may be felt in the words: "His early ambition had been to have as effective a share as possible" in the practical labor of the world.

To be sure, there are characters outside this charmed circle, but they are very few indeed. Decisively, we may mention only Sir James and his wife Celia, both of whom enjoy a kind of vegetable peace, and Mrs. Garth, who exemplifies the peace of self-abnegation. Now, without doubt, these two alternative modes of being held much attraction for the novelist; but finally, I suggest, she is merely grateful that they exist, like places of shelter in a storm. On the whole, she must agree with Dorothea: "Failure after long perseverance is much grander than never to have a striving good enough to be called a failure." And thus her heart is with her heroes, not with these comforting counterweights.

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There is in *Middlemarch,* then, a collapse of both the poetry of social life and the poetry of ambition: a collapse of George Eliot's world of belief. And it is this devastation, so quietly recorded, so selflessly documented, that sets *Middlemarch* apart from and high above George Eliot's novels of faith. Here, gathering her courage, she walks into the far side of her beliefs, where the community lies heavy as granite and the ego is a famine. She faces the negations of her own fond illusions. The book then would seem to constitute an awakening, and yet, oddly, George Eliot was next to write *Daniel Deronda* in a sleep of forgetting, as if she had never seen the sand behind her mirages. Perhaps this only confirms one impression that *Middlemarch* creates: that of being a book which has written itself, a book that merely passed through the novelist. It may well be that she never realized what escaped her pen. In any case, the isolated and remarkable achievement of this novel in the canon is that here, instead of floating up to the surface, George Eliot touched the bottom, or somewhere very near the bottom, of the nature of the ego and of social life.

There are a few great books that, in their powerful recognition of negations, have the effect of making life appear more precious, of making us feel that the fate of individuals matters more than we had known; and for all its painfulness, indeed because of it, *Middlemarch* is one of these books. No other novel has ever shown such comprehension of the agonies of personal insignificance. True, it is with a wholly characteristic moralism that George Eliot writes in *Middlemarch:* "We are all of us born in moral stupidity, taking the world as an udder to feed our supreme selves." But in none of her other novels does she appear so much to regret that the self is not, in fact, supreme, and that only the world may be said to be "stupendous." And nothing reveals this new sympathy for the individual so wonderfully as Dorothea's elopement with Ladislaw. Involving, as it does, a defiance of public opinion, it breaks through the ice of that social timidity which otherwise encases the novelist's work. In *Daniel Deronda,* it is true, Catherine Arrowsmith will defy Mammon in the persons of her parents; but Dorothea does a braver thing—she throws off "the opinion of everyone connected with her." And what she thus declares—against the customary current of George Eliot's irony—is precisely her "high individual value."

Writing in 1914, Ortega predicted that the realistic novel of

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the nineteenth century "will be unreadable very soon," because "the tension" in it is very weak: "the ideal *falls* from a very small height." In *Middlemarch* (as against, say, *Madame Bovary*) the tension is, it happens, rather great; for here, at least, George Eliot was the opponent—and not, like certain other realists, the secret friend—of the plebeian. And its realism is accordingly poetic. The "poetry of realism," Ortega said, lies in "the force of attraction which reality exercises over meteor-like ideals." And certainly what moves us in literary realism is, in part, its night of falling stars. But perhaps we may refine a little on Ortega's theory. For there would seem to be a poetry in the night itself—an aesthetic interest and power, a separate source of pleasure. Just as the night brings out the brightness of meteors, so meteors, once they have vanished, bring out the power of the darkness, which seems to increase and press the heavier on us. The dynamism of the novel lies not only in the collapse of the poetic, but in the emerging utterness of reality itself.

The beauty and power of *Middlemarch,* at any rate, resides less in its "poetic" tension than in its commitment to the truth. Everywhere within it we feel the force of reality: we touch an absolute. And obviously this realism consists in more than the negations of the novelist's faiths; there is also, in *Middlemarch,* a notable realism of method. Its essential truths about the ego and social life would, after all, lie impotent if it were not for what I have called the novelist's concentration and rigor. Her method is the justification, if one is needed, of literary positivism. It is, so to speak, the registration, drop by drop, of the formation of a stalagmite of disillusionment—a slow-motion photography of spiritual falls. There is, then, something basic in the method itself. When we read about the problems of Lydgate's marriage or about Casaubon's "inward trouble" or about Bulstrode's public fall, it doesn't occur to us that these are *imagined* realities. For here the imagination seems as absolute as reality itself. And when the imagination has attained to this asceticism, we can no longer think of it as simply aesthetic. Having arrived at the real through a kind of heroic submission, its quality is moral and philosophical as well. It is the mind in its negative fullness.

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W. S. MERWIN

A Calm in April

Early mist
mountains like a rack of dishes
in a house I love
far mountains
last night the stars for a while
stopped trembling
and this morning the light will speak to me
of what concerns me

Translations from Jean Follain

LANDSCAPE OF A CHILD ON HIS WAY TO THE PLACE OF THE REGENTS

This great liquid silence
inhabiting the barrels
these tiny insects
trying in vain to devour the skin of virgins
the wheelwrights drinking near the blue thistle
the hornets making their white honey
the bees distilling their blond honey
the flashing cauldrons
that are rubbed with wet ashes
the sounds of the storm's end
the rank smoke
of weeds burning in piles
in box-hedged gardens
and the portrait of a king
on the kitchen wall

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and the clay and plaster
in the damp kingdoms:
All of it is the Messenger of an impossible dawn:
there she is already at the top of the hill
the widow
leading by the hand to the distant school
the child with the wild red hair.

BLACK MEAT

Around stones called precious
which only their own
dust can wear down
the eaters of venison
carve in silence
their black meat
the trees on the horizon
imitate in outline
a giant sentence.

THE SCHOOL AND NATURE

Drawn on the blackboard
in the classroom in a town
a circle remained intact
and the teacher's chair was deserted
and the students had gone
one sailing on the flood
another plowing alone
and the road went winding
a bird letting fall
the dark drops of its blood.

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DAVID PAUL FUNT

Newer Criticism and Revolution

How is it that a group of critics with an avowedly formalist conception of literature and of the function of criticism can claim to be allied not only to the idea but to the act of revolution? In 1948 Sartre summed up the practice of a generation of revolutionary artists when he wrote: "Prose is utilitarian by essence; I would willingly define the prose writer as a man who *uses* words."[1] The poet too employs words: "But he does not use them in the same way; he does not even *use* them at all; I would say instead that he serves them. Poets are men who refuse to utilize language. . . . Nor do they dream of *naming* the world and, by this fact, they name nothing at all, for naming implies a constant sacrifice of the name to the object named, or as Hegel would say, the name reveals itself as the inessential in the face of the thing which is essential" (p. 17). The poet for Sartre is not *in* the language like normal men and prose writers; the language is not for him like an extension of his senses, like his body which he lives; he is outside of it. The poet makes an object of language, gives it all the opacity of things. Prose writing, on the other hand, is an *unveiling*. No communication, he asserts, is possible between the two realms.

Sartre readily admits that poetry, by its very nature, is incapable of being socially or politically committed, and hence no such commitment ought to be demanded of it. Whatever the value of poetry might finally be, Sartre makes his own feelings on the subject of the relative importance of prose and poetry clear: "It goes without saying that in all poetry a certain form of prose, that is to say, of success, is present; and reciprocally, the driest prose always contains a bit of poetry, that is, a certain form of failure" (p. 48n. 5).

The prose writer, then, of whom it is a question for Sartre, when speaking of commitment in literature, uses language in the same way in which it is used in everyday life. It is for him

[1] Jean-Paul Sartre, *Qu'est-ce que la littérature* (Paris, 1948), p. 26; English translation by Bernard Frechtman, *What is Literature* (New York, 1965).

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a tool by which he designates, demonstrates, questions, insults, etc. His language ought to disappear, leaving only the essential, the bare object before us. The language of prose is a medium of communication between subjects and objects, the medium itself being ideally transparent, hence invisible. Moreover, the language is commanded by the objects with which it must deal. "If we no longer write as in the Seventeenth Century, it is because the language of Racine and Saint-Evremond does not lend itself to speaking of locomotives or of the proletariat" (p. 34).

Thus Sartre gave a theoretical voice to what had already become the aesthetic ideal of revolutionary artists and party officials: a styleless art, an art in which the manner would efface itself to the advantage of the objects treated. That the role of style in revolutionary realist art so quickly became glaring is a measure of the temporal character of "styleless" art forms, of their excessive stylization. That the theory is hardly revolutionary is clear from the fact that it is the accepted mode of writing best-sellers in all capitalist countries. While Sartre summed up an experience which, as an explicit doctrine of revolutionary art, was for all intents past and beyond recovery, his account of the function of language in literature remains the best description of the common run of contemporary novels in America and Europe.

It was not long after Sartre's essay that another writer appeared on the critical scene who would profoundly affect French criticism. *Le Degré zéro de l'écriture* of Roland Barthes appeared in 1953, though it was only after 1960 that Barthes came to the center of the critical stage. Now there is a peculiar ambivalence in Barthes' short, but extremely dense essay, to the point that Gérard Genette, a disciple of Barthes, could write: "*Le Degré zéro de l'écriture,* in 1953, seemed to extend the reflection begun by Sartre into the domain of form."[2] And yet, at least from our vantage point, it is easy to see that Barthes contradicts Sartre on almost every point.

Consider the central difference, from which all the others will be seen to flow. For Sartre the prose writer *uses* language as a tool to speak of objects. For Barthes the very essence of literature (including prose) is that the writer does not employ language as an instrument, but as his material (Sartre's definition of the

[2] Gérard Genette, *Figures* (Paris, 1966), p. 185.

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poet). Barthes distinguishes the *écrivain* from what he calls the *écrivant* (simple scribe) on this basis. The *écrivain* takes ordinary language as a material to work upon; he reflects upon the language which society presents him in order to alter it. That is to say, he chooses the structure of his own language, or fabricates it as a second language in order to work a transformation upon the signification of the social language, and hence upon the world it expresses. The *écrivant,* on the other hand, uses language as a ready-made, always available tool to convey certain pre-conceived ideas or objects.

To give primacy to the object, as Sartre does, is precisely to fall in with the conservative myth which pretends that language is transparent, dissimulating its historical and sociological character. For a language is inevitably an object, developed over a given period in a society with a particular social and economic structure, all of which is built into the language as an instrument of social domination. The modern French language, as well as the other Western European languages, is a product of the rise of the bourgeoisie to a dominant position in society and incorporates the values of that class. Language is not, then, what Sartre takes it for, the timeless and transparent medium by means of which objects can present themselves to subjects in an undistorted manner, leaving the would-be revolutionary writer with merely the problem of choosing the appropriate objects to write about. This is the way in which established society would have language understood, in order to have the vehicle of its own values accepted as *natural,* i.e., necessary, and to make the very conception of revolutionary change impossible, because unspeakable. And this too is why the writer who takes the language as his object—the subverter of language—is the revolutionary, the founder of the possibility of radical change, while Sartre's committed writer finds his task constantly undermined by the limits of his language and of his world, which he has not himself imposed or even dared to reflect upon.

Language does not merely point to, call up, or describe objects and then conveniently disappear, leaving the naked objects before us. Rather it clothes them, gives them their relations and their character, makes them what they are. How is it then that it seems to Sartre—as to most people—that language is transparent, invisible, that it does not trouble the "real" world? In

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part it is due to the fact that Sartre thinks and speaks of words, of individual units of discourse which label particular objects, rather than of language, a structure of relations in which units signify as a function of their situation. For a language is not merely a collection of elements, but a tightly knit whole in which the sense of each unit is determined, not by an immediate liaison to some object outside the system, but by its relations to other units within it.

There is, however, another and perhaps more important consideration. That which is normal disappears, which is the reason for the obstinate protection of the normalcy of literary and artistic form by establishment critics and the establishment public, and for their outraged indignation at any violation of the norms of form. One would hardly expect such outrage if the question were merely one of aesthetics. One need not read the offensive book or look at the offensive painting. Yet this response is not satisfactory, and the reason can only be that the violation represents something far broader than the mere subversion of aesthetics—the subversion of a certain form of society. Thus capitalist society has usually accomplished implicitly, by critical and public censure, what the communist state accomplishes by party dictate. The normal comes in this process to be the "natural." (To violate the norms of art is not merely to sin against aesthetics, nor even to sin against society, which might be forgivable, but to sin against nature.) The fact that language constructs and directs the world in which we live, establishes the limits of what we can conceive and communicate, of how we can order events and objects, of the families we can create and the antagonisms we can formulate—this fact must remain hidden. The ideological force of language is repressed, becomes the unconscious of society, and the outrage exhibited at having it dragged into the open is the same as that of the resistant patient at having his unconscious motivations set before him.

Nothing is less immediate than the "immediate." The man whose dress I fail to take note of is the one who is "correctly" dressed. He is no less a part of a fashion for that. The "immediate" object or experience is simply that before which no troubling element obtrudes itself. It is no less a fabrication for that. Maurice Blanchot makes the point clearly in considering Mallarmé's dis-

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tinction between the *brute* or *immediate word* and the *essential word:*

> In the brute or immediate word, language becomes silent as language, but things speak in it, and as a consequence of the *usage* to which it is destined—because it serves first of all to place us in relations with objects, because it is a tool in a world of tools, in which what speaks is utility, value—in it things speak as values, taking on the stable appearance of objects existing one by one and giving themselves the certainty of the immutable. . . . The brute word is neither brute nor immediate. But it gives the illusion of being so. It is highly reflected; it is heavy with history. But most often . . . the word seems the place of an immediately given revelation, seems the sign that the truth is immediate, always the same and always available.[3]

Nothing, he adds, is more foreign to the tree than the word tree, as it is used in everyday language. The essential word, on the other hand, is that which sets the thing at a distance in order to stand forth itself as an object. "In it," says Blanchot, "no one speaks and what speaks is no one, but it seems that the word alone speaks itself" (p. 58).

Sartre's poetic word is, not only for Blanchot, but for critics as different as Barthes and Georges Bataille, the very essence of literature. Bataille quotes Sartre as saying: "In Mallarmé the reader and author annul themselves at the same time, extinguish themselves reciprocally so that finally the word alone exists." And Bataille adds: "I would not say 'in Mallarmé'; I would say everywhere that literature is manifest."[4] Thus Sartre's conception of prose writing—what Bataille calls *weak communication,* communication by means of a stock of pre-formed concepts which transmit the common values already built into them without ever transgressing the limits of the given common language—is precisely the decoy set out by established society to allay change. *Strong communication,* for Bataille, which is that of great literature, transgresses the linguistic prohibitions in order to break through to the forbidden realm where sense is created. The revolution, it would seem, is on the side of the poets (in poetry or prose) whose task it is to make, as Barthes says, "a spectacle of language."

[3] Maurice Blanchot, *L'Espace littéraire* (Paris, 1955), 36-7.
[4] Georges Bataille, *La Littérature et le mal* (Paris, 1957), p. 220.

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The interposition of language as a disruptive element between subject and object, however, has consequences more far-reaching than at first appear. For once language is recognized as a force determining the limits and character of the world in which one lives, it is equally clear that nothing escapes its domain. Both subject and object seem to disappear in the wake of this assertion. Nevertheless, one critical tendency, which we may call subjective structuralism, among whose best known proponents are Georges Poulet and Jean-Pierre Richard (as well as the later Sartre himself), has recognized the formative power of language while still remaining within the Sartrean framework. These critics have adopted as their method the disengagement of the immanent structures or themes of a work as a means of discovering and ultimately identifying with the subjectivity which lived and produced them. Unlike the traditionalist critic—who though long outmoded and condemned is still, in various guises, very much with us, and who strives whenever possible to circumvent the work in order to get directly at the subject *behind* it—for the subjective structuralists it is *in* and *through* the work that the subject is sought (though a certain ambiguity often remains as to where the subject is ultimately located). Language, however, remains for them, as for Sartre, a tool utilized by the subject to express itself and its experience. Still the position represents a step beyond the earlier Sartre, for it is admitted that the subject and its objects are altered by their language, such that the world of the work becomes a function of the language employed, rather than the language a function of the "real" objects the author chooses to write about.

When the issue is pressed a bit further, however, the very existence of a subject in literature falls into question. "The [objective] structuralist method," writes Genette, "comes into being at the exact moment when one discovers the message in the code, disengaged by an analysis of the immanent structures, and no longer imposed from without by the prejudices of an ideology" (p. 150). That is to say that it is the language constructed by the writer which delivers its meaning and not merely the author's subjectivity which exposes itself. The interpretation of a literary subjectivity requires in any case (though this is what is usually hidden) a psychological, historical, ethical, and political theory; that is, whether explicit or implicit, an ideology.

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What objective structuralism implies is that the work itself contains the system of its own interpretation, is in fact constituted by it, and that this is what ought to be sought by the critical activity. If language is really an object, if it gives determination and orientation to the world it presents, creates and limits its possibilities, then it is the language which speaks and not the subjectivity of the author. Thus Barthes and other objective structuralists come to consider the literary work as language through and through, language expressive of *itself,* of its own values, rather than of a subject which utilizes it. This critical notion, so antagonistic to traditional thought, takes on weight from the manifest concern of so many major modern writers—Mallarmé, Proust, Joyce come immediately to mind—to destroy the traditional literary subjectivity (and not merely to hide it), to give free rein to language to express itself while signifying an *absence* at its center.

In this connection Barthes' introduction of the concept of *écriture* in *Le Degré zéro,* deserves careful consideration. The *écriture* of a writer is produced by his reflection upon his language and its direction, that is, the set of values with which it is charged. It is the result of his choice of the intentionality which will render his work a coherent totality. Barthes attempts clearly to distinguish *écriture* from language and style, as a third dimension of literary form. The language, he asserts, establishes a horizon for the writer, the initial limit of the possible. Style, on the other hand, plunges into the depths of his psycho-biological being; it is his system of automatisms, his private ritual, the necessity which binds the temperament of the writer to his expression. In the language, says Barthes, the writer finds the familiarity of history, in style that of his own past. Both are givens; the writer chooses neither one nor the other. "But," he continues, "all form is also value, which is why there is room, between language and style, for another formal reality: *écriture.* In any literary form whatever, there is the choice of a general tone, of an ethos, if you wish, and it is precisely here that the writer individualizes himself clearly because it is here that he commits himself.[5] Reflection upon language as an object full of possibilities

[5] Roland Barthes, *Le Degré zéro l'écriture* (Paris, 1953), p. 16; English translation by Annette Lavers and Colin Smith, *Writing Degree Zero* (New York, 1967). The translators render the term *écriture* as "writing" or "mode of writing." I have deemed it preferable here to retain the French term because of the very special meaning which Barthes attaches to it.

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and the choice of an *écriture* embodying a given intentionality are characteristic of modern writing (dating from the nineteenth century) as distinct from the classical conception (with which Sartre is in agreement) of a given language as the natural and universal vehicle of truth. The tone or ethos which is the *écriture* of a writer is determined by the particular linguistic structures which he chooses to employ, by the recurrent semantic unities he uses and the kinds of relations he establishes between them. It is these structures, rather than the matter written about, which manifest the sort of pact which the writer has chosen to contract with society, a pact upon which he can renege only by means of a personal intrusion into his work and at the cost of destroying its wholeness. Within the literary space laid out by his *écriture* the writer transcribes his words—the same ones used by everyone in his society. But it is in the gaps between them, there where the system of relations which constitutes his *écriture* manifests itself, that what they will signify is determined, at least for the reader who reads the *work*, and not merely the words contained therein, as if each designated a fixed and immutable object in the "real" world outside the work. The literary work speaks as an absence, writes Blanchot. "Where it does not speak, already it speaks; when it ceases, it perseveres" (p. 51).

Thus the form is brought to the fore, becomes the material upon which the writer works and upon which the critic must concentrate his efforts. But this formalism, far from representing a flight from society, implies a commitment to it. Any subject matter may be treated in any language, for it is not the objects which determine the language but the language which determines what the objects treated will signify. One can write glowingly of locomotives and the proletariat and yet write as a reactionary, just as one can write positively of the bourgeoisie and yet write as a revolutionary. Thus it appears that it is the anti-formalist who is the anti-revolutionary. For to pretend that objects can be grasped or evoked in their totality by words is to maintain and reinforce the values of the status quo. Every object has an indefinite number of aspects by which it might be associated, conjoined, disjoined, compared, opposed, etc., to others, some of which are privileged by any given language. What can be meaningfully expressed in a language, and hence the values assignable in it, is limited by the aspects to which it grants primacy. Whatever

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the world may be like, the system of *our* world is established by our language. The bourgeois myth, on the other hand, maintains that the two are one and the same. The possibility of committed literature lies in the writer's ability to close his world of language —thereby closing himself out of it as its immanent subject— and to allow it to manifest a form which founds possibilities other than those contained in the universe of everyday discourse. What the literary work claims to give to history, states Blanchot, is the initiative, the possibility of a point of departure.

Writing thereby becomes a self-destructive task (and so recognized by such writers as Flaubert, Mallarmé, Proust, Kafka)— manifestly destructive of the literary subject. The language itself becomes the ultimate subject, the man his discourse and not merely the user of it. The scandal lies in the denial that the modern conception of the subject is universally valid. It is language, and a particular historical language, whose roots and interests can be traced, which created the clearly individualized subject, irretrievably cut off from its neighbors, an unclouded window on a world of utilitarian values, and it is language which will destroy it again, if it is to be destroyed. Thus writing, for Sartre "a certain secondary mode of action," for Bataille, Blanchot and Barthes is nothing if it is not the essential.

After the death of the last writer, asserts Blanchot, there would be, not silence, but a continuous sound, barely a murmur, whose sole characteristic would be its incessance. Everything speaks to us constantly, because nature and culture are permeated with language. Yet they say nothing distinct, pronounce no word, remain merely an undertone. One does not hear it, one need not listen to it, because what it says *goes without saying*. The public ear has always already heard everything in advance, for the public hum is the absence and the void of any firm and decided word. The writer is he who produces a word in order to impose silence on the incessant murmur. The writer does not name the world, as Sartre declared, but writes in the face of a world which is aleady named and too much named.

Literature is signs and not reality. Convinced that we live in a world of non-linguistic realities while literature is merely language, traditionally committed critics conclude that literature is inexorably cut off from reality. The only hope of salvation for the writer, then, lies in effacing his language as much as pos-

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sible. If, on the contrary, we live in a world of signs, the question is rather, what distinguishes the signs of literature from the signs of reality? The difference lies in the writer's fabrication of his own language, in situating himself at the point, as Phillippe Sollers says, "where non-sense passes into sense and where, in the proper meaning of the terms, we realize our signs."[6]

Since literature is signs and not reality, it is signs and combinations of them which constitute the things in it. What their character, their destination, their social and historical intention will be is determined by a sort of sub-language—the *écriture* of the author. An author may choose to adopt the ordinary language as his sub-language, thus allowing it to merge with and disappear in the object signs which it manipulates. Thereby he attains to normalcy of form—creates a literature which will be praised for being *so real,* which does not trouble in any profound way the values of his society. Whether his characters perform correctly or abominably will make no difference for they can never transgress the boundaries of that world as set by the language employed. Their abominable acts will merely be rejected or condemned without further ado. Thus the contemporary "realist" writer reinforces the myths of contemporary society by dissimulating his under-language. But he has no less an *écriture,* albeit it is one constructed and imposed by another. His work is no more real or immediate for being common. It is no more normal for appearing so. It remains language, fabrication of a system of signs charged with an intentionality. Literature is by nature abnormal, and being so can only pretend to normalcy by selling its soul to the forces of immobility. But if it does so, it reaps its rewards in death, when, outstripped by social change, its pretences to normalcy come to be seen as nothing more than a degenerative sickness of the soul. "There are no innocent languages," writes Barthes. To which Georges Bataille adds: "Literature is not innocent, and, guilty, it ought finally to avow itself so."

The task of literature today is the subversion of language, of the language which clothes society, protects its virtue, hides its unclean parts. The concerned writer will thus be he who makes that language—in the measure that it is possible—unspeakable.

[6] Phillippe Sollers, *Logiques* (Paris, 1968), p. 138.

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HAROLD WITT

The Annunciation

If only it weren't there and life weren't either—
she knelt and prayed with her fanatic rag
against her father and against my father
who kept their slimy secrets in a bag—
and now I too began to have the sag
and darkly sprouted to her white disgust—
O wasn't there anyone in whom to trust?—
the meaning was enough to make her gag.
She dropped the Ivory Soap into the tub
and turned away as wordless toward the door
as if a shining shell had shown a slug,
and never came to wash me anymore—
she'd heard the angel tell her of a son
and knew his hated coming would be soon.

Sugar and Spice

Sugar and spice they said, but unconvinced,
and hot as Galileo for the truth,
I couldn't be content until I'd glimpsed,
like guessed at worlds seen close-up through a tube,
the thing itself, the curve of nakedness.
I had no sisters, and my only mother,
fearing my theory, locked her door to dress,
and so I gave a nickel to a brother—
not my own, but one with views to sell,
in secret, where a leaflight filtered through.
I swore that I would neither touch nor tell,
and saw his sister lifting as I grew
certain I was right, her skirt to show
the apple proof—what every boy should know.

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Maud Winters' Swedish Massage Salon

When Maud Winters' Swedish Massage Salon
moved in, the neighborhood slipped down a
notch—
that elongated son on a motorcycle,
the Wolfhound instead of a pooch.

In a gangster movie aura
everything looked black and white—
men at the door, dark hats pulled down
and shirtfronts doubly bright.

Gin bottles gleamed in the ashcan,
the son roared home late at night,
a police car throbbed through the alley—
something wasn't quite right.

We heard a slapslap as on rubber—
Maud Winters plying her trade,
buttocks and belly of blubber
with an Edward G. Robinson face

steamed in imagination
and the son gunned off leaving tracks
of surmise toward some assignation
down at the Mexican shacks,

but he sped to his own beheading,
his life sliced by a truck.
And everyone saw two days later
when the funeral car drove up

Maud Winters and her daughter
on the steps of our wildest dreams,
dainty in black, and veiled
as beekeepers or mourning queens,

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while the light seemed to pale around them
and the Wolfhound whined at the screen,
dabbing with delicate hands
at the face of anyone's grief.

Starting at Thirteen,

I kept a diary—
all my secret plans—friends who weren't friends—
a brother who beat me up until he got married—
that code of dots at many entries' ends . . .

and reading back I am that boy again
seeing too many movies, weeding the yard,
letting out in the dark the hidden man . . .

as it was poor Mom had enough men on her hands,
and I tried hard to be good, not let her know—
at least until later—but while I wrote it down
and dutifully weeded and listened to the radio
(Mary Marlin, Oxydol's Own Ma Perkins, Dr. Kate)
seeds she didn't suspect were coming up from below . . .

a rain of words watered me
from the stormy books I was reading

and while I went soberly down the aisle
taking up the collection
what I was wondering was
if Christ ever had an erection . . .

"Sometimes I think I'm a misfit," I noted sadly,
November 10, 1939,
looking out over the dark roofs at bright Orion—
and would have lain down with any girl gladly . . .

my handwriting became more erratic,
my pages spotted with dots . . .
Margie Stoller got engaged to a mustached man with an Olds—
and then in the late spring of nineteen forty
I finally found the poets.

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JOHN SIMON

Theatre Chronicle

THE THEATRE IN OUR TIME has been such a parade of trivia and ephemera that it has considerably shortened the critical life span. One after another, Mary McCarthy, Eric Bentley, Susan Sontag, Robert Brustein, Richard Gilman (I am naming the more interesting figures, without endorsing them equally) either gave up completely on drama criticism, or drastically limited their activity in the field. Specific reasons for these total or partial withdrawals are various, but behind all of them may be found disenchantment with our New York (or American, or world) theatre, and a sense that covering it regularly is not an occupation worthy of a serious critic—in fact, the more seriously he takes *the* theatre, the less worthy of taking up his time.

I have often wondered whether I should apologize—to my readers, to Thespis, or to myself—for obdurately persevering, year after year. Besides covering the local theatre for THE HUDSON REVIEW, I have done so, at one time or another, for *Theatre Arts, Commonweal,* and educational television, and now for *New York* magazine. The chief argument against this kind of endurance is that one eventually finds oneself reviewing the same play over and over again. There are some honorable exceptions, needless to say, but basically it is the same Hydra-headed monster that keeps rearing futher brainless heads, regardless of how many of them adverse criticism, public displeasure, and time itself have amputated. Again and again the same play with footling variations: with music or without, with literary pretensions or without, with or without a homosexual angle, lurching into sensationalism or sliding into sentimentality. Favorite types have been the Jewish family comedy, the generation gap comedy, the pseudoabsurdist farce (genuine absurdism is comparatively rare), the Negro problem play (serious or satirical) and, of course, the marital, premarital, and extramarital sex caper. What all these genres usually have in common is cynical or simple-minded, audience-pleasing or self-indulgent manipulation of reality. As a result, critics find themselves running out of epithets, images, and epigrams with which to express their unchanging fundamental revulsion. And they quit.

Why, then, do I persist? Is my stock of synonymous pejoratives, derogatory tropes, antipathetic aphorisms inexhaustible? Is this, in other words, the triumph of rhetoric over good sense? Or is it force of habit, stubbornness, masochism? Or is there simply nothing else I can do? The real reasons, I think, are unflagging (and perhaps unholy) curiosity combined with an unquenchable hope, and an enjoyment of arts and crafts other than those of the dramatist. The

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curiosity centers on just how the theatre will appropriate, digest, and, in most cases, vulgarize current issues and ideologies. The hope, obviously, attaches to the rare good play that finally does show up, no matter how bad things are. By other arts and crafts, I mean, of course, everything from direction and acting to lighting and design. And I also mean the occasional ability of the commerical playwright to construct something less than art but pleasing in its skillful workmanship. And there is also something else. My position is, I suspect, comparable to that of the writer in a totalitarian state who prefers life under an almost unbearable system to emigration to a liberal but foreign land. He clings, first, to his roots, and, secondly, to his language. For better or worse, I feel at home in the theatre—and where else would I go? Only film and literature are, among the arts, in better shape than theatre, and I write film and literary criticism for other publications. But theatre is my first love, and to it I must always return. As for going into other aspects of the theatre, yes, I do a little teaching and lecturing now and then, but drama criticism is my language, and I cannot settle down where that language is not spoken. To be sure, there is a difference: the, let us say, Russian writer is, however stuntedly, engaging in a dialogue; whereas the noncommercial critic is cut off by a thick wall from the predominantly commercial theatre. Yet there is a hope in the very fact that is the Russian writer's undoing—that even the walls have ears.

Two of the newer phenomena in the New York theatre are Negro militancy (as opposed to mere racial relations) and nudity; they echo the black and sexual revolutions. Let us start with the lesser problem, which takes the form not only of nudity but also of other types of sexual permissiveness. Two plays by Terrence McNally appeared off-Broadway under the title of the first, *Sweet Eros.* In that one, a psychopath has abducted a girl to his hide-out and tied her to a chair. He harangues her endlessly, undresses her totally, feeds her, has intercourse with her, and wins her over to his way of life. He can now untie her: she sits there naked and quite content as he goes on lecturing her. She never speaks, only occasionally soothes his savage breast by singing *Plaisir d'amour.* The play is absolute trash, but it does expose Sally Kirkland in the nude for some forty-five minutes. The man, played by Robert Drivas, also undresses at one point, but for him the lights are dimmed and we see him mostly from the back. For the ensuing intercourse, there is still a blanket across the heaving bodies. Nevertheless, this proved nudity enough to keep a lamentable little show running for over two-and-a-half months; clothed, it would have closed within a week.

Other shows have promptly tried to capitalize on this device. In the second play of the Broadway triple bill, *Morning, Noon and Night* (that second play also by Terrence McNally!) a nymphomaniac is in the process of stripping until the uncoöperativeness of

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her potential partner stops her. The director, Theodore Mann, tried hard to persuade the actress not to stop at the bra-and-panties stage; pointing to her contract, however, she was able to refuse. The show, which was not the typical Broadway fare, but had received rather good reviews and was not without merit, then resorted to a two-dollar price top to keep itself afloat. This, however, proved much less life-prolonging than nudity. During rehearsals for Jerome Weidman's *The Mother Lover,* standard old-fashioned Broadway trash, it was decided to introduce an irrelevant nude scene, which the actress in question, however, refused to play. She was promptly dismissed, and another, more willing, actress engaged instead. But this one, too, had to fight to keep the nudity down to a minimum.

The most emphatic development to date along these lines is *Geese,* an off-Broadway double bill by Gus Weill. The first play, *Parents and Children,* alternates between showing a boy's parents squabbling, mostly about the father's sexual inadequacy, and the boy finding what may be love with another youth, an ex-schoolmate he bumps into. The youths are stark naked full front in bright light, they occasionally kiss and embrace, and, when the lights are lowered on them (in order to go up on the parents, on the upper stage), seem to be quietly copulating in the dark. One such darkened episode looks exactly like buggery, but proves, when the lights go up on the lower stage, nothing more than back massage. In the second play, *Geese,* an unhappy Southern family's daughter (her youthful lover was castrated by Daddy), drifts into a satisfying lesbian relationship with a roommate. The lesbian *scène à faire,* unlike the male homosexual one, allows the actresses pants or panties over their pudenda, but goes in for greater explicitness of language, as when the seductress describes going to parties with the heroine: "There I am with the best-looking cunt swinging from my arm . . ." which those who perceive fossilized metaphors may find physiologically disturbing. The plays are worthless both as plays and productions, displaying some of the worst professional acting and directing I have ever seen, and all depends, clearly, on the bihomosexual nudity. (The audience consisted almost entirely of flagrant pederasts, but did not, contrary to fanciful expectation, yield to lesbians after intermission.) To capitalize on this further, the management has added Sunday-evening discussions of nudity in the theatre, and advertises special Sunday matinees without nudity for spectators under eighteen, allegedly barred from other performances. This is meant merely to attract greater attention to the nude performances, for who, under or over eighteen, would want to see a draped *Geese?*

What does all this portend? Unless there is an official ban, which I hope won't be the case, things will go a little farther yet—there is not that much more left—and finally exhaust themselves. Thenceforth we may get nudity where it is relevant—where it enhances the lyricism, realism or surrealism of a scene—and nowhere else.

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This may have an interesting effect on the classic repertoire. Already Franco Zeffirelli has introduced something of a nude scene into his rather poor film version of *Romeo and Juliet*. The time may come when such scenes in the dramatic repertoire will be staged with partial or total nudity, and the added erotic stimulation (embarrassment, either among actors or audiences, will have been eliminated through habituation) will reinforce the impact of the play. A side benefit will be that actors will stay in better physical trim, which will make even clothed scenes look better. As for Kenneth Tynan's dictum that, if appropriate, he would put copulation on the stage—if he means simulated intercourse, we have already got it. But if he means the real thing, I doubt that even the most disciplined actors could perform it on command, especially on matinee days.

The two most militant Negro plays of the season thus far are both by whites; you are free to draw your own conclusions. *Riot*, an improvisation conceived by Julie A. Portman, was highly successful in a Boston church basement but much less so in a New York one. It is a piece of central staging that switches back and forth between a panel discussion on racial violence and the enactment of ghetto conditions, rioting, counterattack by the National Guard, and, finally, chaos. The debate is among a white Jewish liberal, a white Buckleyite conservative, a Negro moderate, and a Black Panther. They are all perfect clichés. As for the choreographed interludes, which range from extracting live but doped rats from trash cans to troops sticking bayonets almost into the customers' faces and, in the end, a blackout punctured by strobe lights and hideous siren wails—this has been called "gut theatre," and if one could stay at home and send just one's guts to the show, they might indeed respond to it.

The problem with agit-prop theatre, quite aside from the fact that it has nothing to do with art, is that it can be used only as an incentive (to incense), but not as a preventive. You can leave a theatre stirred up to strike, loot, burn, or start a revolution; but how can you be aroused to passivity: conciliatoriness, moderation, tolerance, or what have you? There is no inflaming into coolness. As for horrible warnings, there is no evidence that anything you can fling before today's audiences (hardened by movies and TV where the horrors of war and violence have become the daily pap) has much of an effect. Short of drawing their blood with those bayonets, but even Kenneth Tynan has not yet advocated that. One of the doped rats, by the way, recovered sufficiently to wander off into the vicinity of my legs, but the only lesson I derived from that was to avoid further plays about race riots in church basements.

A potentially more effective piece of political theatre is *Big Time Buck White*. A Negro organization with many white members, the Beautiful Alleluiah Days, or B.A.D. for short, is about to hold a meeting. The leader is one Jive, a shrewd operator, and the guiding

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spirit is an agitator named Big Time Buck White (a typical sample of the verbal wit) whose coiffure seems to have been designed by Buckminster Fuller out of clock springs. B.A.D. is funded by Whitey's government and foundations, with their customary suicidal wisdom. The theatre audience, which includes several plants, represents the black and white members and supporters of B.A.D. The first part of the play has four of the group's officers trying to enlist one another's help to supplant Jive. As they jockey for power, they insult or threaten one another, the audience, Negroes and whites in a spate of racial jokes of all colors: black, white, and off.

Finally, Jive enters and puts them all in their places. Then Big Time stalks in and proceeds to answer questions from the audience. Some of these come from actor-plants, others are real. If they are easy or stupid questions, Big Time deals with them with quiet smugness. If they are difficult, the rest of the cast irrupts with jibes and jeers, getting him off the hook. The underlying message is clear enough: "We'll snuff out your souls like white birthday candles." The play was conceived in Watts, where there are, apparently, several writers' workshops, some acting as lightning rods, some as tinder for racial revolt. The most interesting thing about the play is that it was written by a white, Joseph Dolan Tuotti, which makes *Big Time Buck White* a play either of self-hate, or of self-protection for the come-the-revolution days. The white liberals and black liberators in the audience perform an unholy ritual. They laugh explosively at every shallow joke ("We'll put you on the white list"; "He owns a white dog"; "Rubber Band [a particularly unbalanced type] is going to be our next pope"; "If thirty million Negroes . . ." "Thirty million? Shit, I know a million myself!" etc.) they jump literally out of their seats if not their skins; at every bit of inane braggadocio they applaud and cheer convulsively. Yes, the audience is integrated all right, but for what? For a political black mass, and from mass to massacre the distance seems appallingly short. Let us have thoughtful plays on the subject, even satirical ones, but none of this facile fanaticism.

A gentler type of Negro protest play, I gather, was *God Is a (You Know What),* which, however, I was unable to catch. But I did see *Cities in Bezique,* by Adrienne Kennedy, at the Public Theatre. This is the opposite sort of thing: the Negro masochist play. Mrs. Kennedy's earlier work, *Funnyhouse of a Negro,* was also a psychodrama in which a Negro girl is haunted by ghosts like Patrice Lumumba and realities like her boy friend and family whirling around before her real or mind's eyes. In the first play of the new double bill, *The Owl Answers,* a light-skinned Negro girl (Mrs. Kennedy is half-white) daydreams on the New York subway when Shakespeare, Chaucer, William the Conqueror and Anne Boleyn burst in on her. They have been her tutelary deities, but now proceed to judge her. The scene shifts almost simultaneously to St. Paul's

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in London, where the girl's white father is being buried; and to the Tower, where the four aforementioned worthies are detaining the girl; and also to the South, where she was born from her black mother's affair with the richest white man in town, only to be palmed off on the black minister to whom her mother is married. Interwoven with these imaginary scenes is the real situation: the girl has picked up a young Negro on the subway, taken him home to her Harlem hotel room, but becomes hysterical when he tries to have sex with her and throws him out. Above the revolving stage on which all this swirls about, hovers a papier-mâché dove backed up by a corpulent Negro clad in white feathers—presumably two-thirds of the Trinity (which is you know what). They flap their wings and arms from time to time, and the man makes pregnant but inscrutable pronouncements.

To complicate matters further, figures peel off their outer layers and become other figures; thus Anne Boleyn strips off her Boleyn gear, leaves it standing on stage, and becomes the girl's mother. The sarcophagus is removed from around the dead father and he becomes the living white father; he strips off a mask and becomes the putative black father. The heroine herself is identified as "She who is Clara Passmore who is the Virgin Mary who is the Bastard who is the Owl," and the other characters have similarly multiple identities one inside the other, like those Russian peasant dolls that keep yielding further, smaller dolls down to a tiny, doll-shaped sliver. The language is all desperate pseudopoetry, and the tone is harrowing, harried self-accusation and an occasional striking back. Rather than move linearly, the play tries to spiral inward, but actually just revolves in place, or in no place. The language is pretentious and obscure, the metaphors either banal or impenetrable. And the second play of the bill, *A Beast's Story,* is even more arbitrarily arcane. The painful thing about this is that it seems to justify its utter lack of drama by calling itself poetry, and tries to prop up its poetastery with theatre devices for buttresses. And those flying buttresses out of Mrs. Kennedy's centrifuge can really knock you unconscious. It is a depressing thing when poetry and drama are played off against each other to the detriment of both by people capable of neither.

The most satisfactory play on the Negro question was Israel Horovitz's *Morning,* the opening one-acter of the triple bill by three authors, *Morning, Noon and Night,* Circle in the Square's first venture onto Broadway. In this absurdist farce, a shiftless Negro family is transmuted into whites by some pills that God, himself a black, has given them (the notion of a melananthropomorphic God is fast gaining theatrical ground). A rabid, racist white shows up gun in hand; he believes that his sluttish teen-age daughter was deflowered by Junior, the teen-age hippie son of the family. He is first taken in by their new, lily-of-the-field coloring, and is shunted

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off to a Puerto Rican family below, whose son's name, Jesus, gives rise to lusty *double-entendres*. When the would-be avenger returns wised-up, the former Negroes have become white in spirit as well as pigmentation, paint him black, and reduce him to a cowering victim. The basic idea, that it is not race and color but man's need to dominate and victimize that is our problem, is unexceptionable but also unexceptional. What makes *Morning* (originally called *Chiaroscuro*) remarkable is what it does with language. The white Negroes begin by sounding like minstrel-show characters but end speaking in toney Park Avenue accents. At first they use obscenities as casually as conjunctions; by and by, their language is purified and elevated. But, ironically, as their speech becomes more refined, their behavior becomes more outrageous—more outrageously white—and the comic disparity of form and content in human beings constitutes the play's strongest comment. It was extremely well acted by three of its five actors: Sorrel Booke, Jane Marla Robbins, and Robert Klein. The other two plays, Terrence McNally's *Noon* and Leonard Melfi's *Night,* need not occupy us here; in them, too, the three fine actors did well against crippling odds.

The standard Broadway comedy is represented most sedulously by *Forty Carats* and *Jimmy Shine*. The former, to be sure, is an adaptation of a Paris boulevard farce, but there is nothing like a version by Jay Presson Allen, a production by David Merrick, and direction by Abe Burrows to make a not very foreign foreigner feel right at home on Broadway. *Forty Carats* is a comedy about a woman of forty who finds marrying an ambitious youth of twenty-two more of a problem than it is for her seventeen-year-old daughter to marry a Texas millionaire of forty-five. It is, as it were, standard double-standard farce, one of the basic comic plots hinging on sauce being no less saucy for the goose than for the gander. The humor is of the chattily pseudosophisticated variety, full of presumably prestigious topical references, and, in the lead, Julie Harris, finally acting her age, is quite amusing. The supporting cast is slick, the jokes sufficiently sexual, the three pairs of lovers (young daughter and ripe widower, her middle-aged mother and young man, his aging mother and her comically dapper gigolo) among them cover almost all grounds and titillate most palates.

Jimmy Shine is what its author, Murray Schisgal, serves us repeatedly: old Manischewitz in new, modernistic bottles. The story of a lovable Jewish universal drop-out, a zanily playful goof-off, a foolish yet wise *schlemiel*—I could keep piling up near-synonyms, but you have already got the whole factitious picture. The little idealist who opts out of the rat race and leaves success, money, women to others, less deserving but more crassly ambitious—will we ever see the last of this unappetizingly phoney figure? Jimmy looks back on a life of misadventures with schoolmates, teachers, employers, prostitutes—even a nymphomaniacal hippie is inadvertently converted to

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monasticism by him before he can sleep with her—and he ends up an unsuccessful painter in a cluttered attic. But he is happy, doing Groucho Marx, W. C. Fields and Ronald Colman impersonations, and getting good rates from a jolly Puerto Rican hooker with a heart of—oh no, not gold! Silver; this is a modernist play! And all lies: failure has a terrible stink to it—a comic, tragic, pathetic, sinister stink, depending on how you look at it. But Schisgal douses it with deodorants and mouthwashes until it smells and tastes like nothing—except deodorant and mouthwash. The play moves back and forth in time, is garnished with modernistic pop songs by John Sebastian, and would fall on its streamlined arse if it were not for Dustin Hoffman. As Jimmy, Hoffman elaborates the film role that made him famous, Benjamin in *The Graduate,* and he is a thoroughly charming actor with sufficient off-beat idiosyncrasies to make him a spiny delight. He has his own truth; but the role is merely a Jewish fantasy figure: the successful failure, the yearned-for antiself of all dissatisfied successes, a figure to cosset as well as patronize. Out of such contradictory but not irreconcilable impulses, one creates a languorous, lukewarm footbath for the soul.

And speaking of lukewarm, there is the hit of last year's London season, and thus the almost axiomatic hit of this year's New York one, *Hadrian VII* by Peter Luke. Luke has taken Frederick Rolfe's imaginary autobiography and stressed its wish-fulfillment aspect even more by sandwiching it in between a prologue and epilogue showing the starving "Baron Corvo" as an odd, slightly uncouth, but brilliant little man—a sort of misfit of genius or a greater Jimmy Shine. The far-flung and abstruse range of Rolfe's mind, the tortuously eccentric but captivating style of his writing have been simplified and toned down. Whereas the novel is worldly, complex and learned, the play is neat and homespun. In both, an obscure Englishman who flunked out of the priesthood has miraculously become pope and shocks the College of Cardinals by his humane reforms, until, having finally won them over, he is gunned down by a fanatical enemy. But, for example, in the novel a cardinal who asks what is to become of the reformed priesthood if the faithful do not provide free-will offerings, is told by Hadrian, "Then starve and go to Heaven, as Ruskin says." The play omits the dependent clause, and the line gets a big laugh. In other words, an erudite reference to the grave Ruskin is turned into a bluff, papal wisecrack. That is the leveling process that informs the adaptation.

The supporting cast, like the staging and set design, are undistinguished—though Christopher Hewett, as the Prepositor-General of the Jesuits, carries on as if wearing a soutane made one automatically guest of honor at a drag party. But the play's cynosure is the gushed-about performance of Alec McCowen in the title part, which had disappointed me in London, but there I sat in the front row, an unfair vantage point. From farther back, I was confirmed

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in my belief that this was not great acting, only craftsmanship of a very high order. The difference, I suppose, is this: a solid, technically accomplished performance is one in which the actor does exactly what you imagine yourself, *mutatis mutandis,* doing with the part; a great performance is one that surprises you with things that would never have occurred to you. McCowen, who was an admirable Fool in Peter Brook's dubious *Lear,* performs Rolfe-Hadrian like clockwork. Art races ahead or lingers; McCowen makes everything tick.

A more interesting event is the revival at the Circle in the Square of Jules Feiffer's *Little Murders,* a Broadway flop of two seasons ago. I praised the play then (THE HUDSON REVIEW, Summer 1967) and find it equally good now, though in different ways. The play deals with a typical New York family carrying within itself the seeds of madness. The father is obsessed with fears of unmanliness, the mother is bumblingly overpossessive, the brilliant, successful and domineering daughter specializes in fruitlessly converting fruits into lovers she can cast off, the son is bright but a mother's lapdog well on his way to faggotry. Daughter's new fiancé, whom she does marry, is a photographer made famous by his pictures of excrement; big and strong, he has opted for apathism, an amoeba-like existence consisting of not hitting back at anyone, ever. And there is much to hit back at: prowlers at the door, perverts on the phone, snipers in every window, and the streets littered with muggers. But our family has planted its share of the world's madness as well as reaped it: of the elder son, who was sniped down on Amsterdam Avenue, his father says, "My boy bombed Tokyo. . . . Then he bombed Korea. . . . He hadn't an enemy in the world." Or take, more subtly expressed, the obverse phenomenon, in a dialogue between in-laws: "You have been very good to us, Alfred.—Forget it.—I will." It is not surprising that the family, after Daughter is sniped down in her own living room, turns into a slaphappy band of murderous marksmen. Fun City becomes Gun City; *rus in urbe* turns into *Schuss in urbe.*

Feiffer fills out his plot, first, with a gallery of comic-strip figures: a comic-religious successful Jewish immigrant, a comic-irreligious hippie minister, a comic-paranoid police lieutenant; and, secondly, maniacal monologues in which the main characters report on further weird experiences. These set pieces are not fully integrated into the play and tend to go on too long. But Alan Arkin, who directed the new production, has made everything both frantic and irrefutable, only to be undercut by central staging and economies that forced him to omit silent characters. The play emerges less frightening. It is the realism of windows and doors, of dumb-struck wedding guests and bullet-struck highball glasses shattered in a character's hand that made the absurdity more horrible and believable, as well as more absurd. The performances, as they were on Broadway, are uneven:

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the hippie minister was funnier uptown, this daughter (Linda Lavin) overacts as much as the Broadway one (Barbara Cook) underacted; but the parents (Vincent Gardenia and Elizabeth Wilson) are a definite improvement now, both singly and as a team.

The new crop of musicals has this in common: whatever their points of interest may be, music is not one of them. *Zorbá* is an inept musicalization not so much of Kazantzakis's novel, *Zorba the Greek,* as of Cacoyannis's film version of it, already quite a step down. It is hollow and pretentious in book, music, and lyrics, and the production merely exacerbates it all. *Promises, Promises* is Neil Simon's adaptation of Billy Wilder's film, *The Apartment*; the show is slick and gag-filled, and perhaps even a shade less sleazy than the film. But neither Burt Bacharach's tunes nor Hal David's lyrics have the slightest distinction, so that only Michael Bennett's unforcedly casual and always integral choreography makes us aware of being at a musical. There is one performance with class: A. Larry Haines's wry little doctor. *Celebration,* by Schmidt and Jones, the authors of *The Fantasticks,* is a rather pretentious attempt to tell a 1910-ish goody-goody fairy tale as if it were at once timeless ritual and daringly contemporary and innovative. The show fails on almost all counts, except that Ed Wittstein's scenery and masks (though not his costumes) have a properly primitive, primordial appeal. The enterprise, moreover, fulsomely harps on God, but there is too much *machina* in this *deus* to make him very convincing. *Red, White and Maddox* is an attempt at a satirical musical, a take-off on the preposterous governor of Georgia. The show was cooked up at Theatre Atlanta, where its amiably simple, derivative persiflage (tunes and ideas from all over, notably *The Music Man* and *Oh What a Lovely War!*) might have had greater topical interest and seemed less second-hand. As for *Dames at Sea,* a vastly successful off-Broadway musical, it is a clever but pointless evocation of Ruby Keeler-Dick Powell-Busby Berkeley movie musicals, never able to decide whether it wants to be satire or nostalgia, and totally otiose as either.

Our repertory companies stumble along as usual. Lincoln Center has come up with an early play by William Gibson about Shakespeare's youth in Stratford, *A Cry of Players,* which endeavors to explain the sallying forth of genius from humdrum surroundings. It is not a good play, but neither is it so bad as plays about Shakespeare usually are. Gene Frankel has directed it animatedly enough, Frank Langella plays the lead with a credible, almost poetic energy as well as sensitivity, and if it were not for Gibson's unsuccessful rhetorical flights and Anne Bancroft's Bronx guttersnipe quality, the thing would work well enough. Alternating with this was a truly disastrous *King Lear,* pitifully staged by Gerald Freedman and deplorably acted by all but Philip Bosco as Kent and one or two minor players. The chief disappointment was Lee J. Cobb's Lear, which only went

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to show that excelling at the sad stories of the death of salesmen does not necessarily qualify one for deeper and greater things. Cobb's Lear was paltry in stature, Jewish in coloration, and rose to no heights. In its small experimental theatre, the Forum, the company treated us to *Bananas* by John White, a shot at telling a story about real people in the language and conventions of Minsky's burlesque; it failed abjectly, although Patricia Roe gave an impressively versatile performance. Next, a double bill by Charles Dizenzo, under the collective title *An Evening for Merlin Finch,* pointed in an interesting direction, but proceeded along another, quite shopworn one. A.P.A. slapped together *The Cocktail Party,* an anemic play perniciously performed, and followed this up with *The Misanthrope,* in Richard Wilbur's exemplary translation, but staged, designed, and acted without style or with entirely the wrong kind—all to great critical and audience acclaim. *Cock-a-Doodle Dandy* was tacky in every way, the actors, worst of all, having looked up the wrong definition of brogue and stuck both their feet in it.

We were visited by two further repertory companies: Die Brücke, from Germany, which put on an agreeable *Minna von Barnhelm* and a spunky but not fully realized *Das Schloss* (Kafka's *Castle* as dramatized by Max Brod). This is an *ad hoc* company that plays mostly to American colleges, carries simple, inexpensive (and, in the case of *Minna,* inadequate) scenery, but the acting was quite good, and that of several character actors outstanding. The Minneapolis Theatre Company brought us a version of the *Oresteia* in a shoddy English version by John Lewin, entitled *The House of Atreus,* and directed by Tyrone Guthrie. On the one hand, there was mythic antiquity with huge figures in masks and on cothurns, and men playing women's parts; on the other, the play modernized by playing large chunks for laughs, by having those men in women's parts camping them up, and by rather peculiar Weillian singsong for the chorus. Not quite so much of a fiasco was *Arturo Ui,* minor and somewhat dated Brecht in George Tabori's hammed-up adaptation, but nicely directed by Edward Payson Call. The acting was less than noteworthy, but there were a few sound performances and some adroit slide projections chronicling Hitler's rise to power.

We finally got to see the much-praised *Tango* by Slawomir Mrožek, a leading Polish modernist, which has been applauded from Genoa to Haifa, but proved in New York pale imitation Ionesco, not helped by dire acting and witless staging. Most of the acting was, in fact, so rotten; the sets and costumes, derived from the original Polish production, so uninventive; and the work of the young German director, Heinz Engels (who had co-directed the successful Düsseldorf production with Erwin Axer, the famous Polish director who staged the play in Poland) so leaden, that the whole international theatre situation once again looked hopelessly bleak. Perhaps one should give up drama criticism, after all.

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CHARLES W. MILLARD

Dada, Surrealism, and the Academy of the Avant-Garde

> . . . one must always beware of falling into the common error of today, that of confusing *dreams* with *poetry*.
>
> —Paul Valéry
>
> One must be of one's time.
>
> —Honoré Daumier

In the great deal that has recently been written about Dada and Surrealism, it has not been sufficiently noted that both were movements trading on previous styles, and both were attempts to modify modernism to make it "easier" and to reintroduce literary content into art. Although Dada feigned opposition to Cubism, it grew directly out of ideas and visual devices, such as those of Futurism, which were tangential to Cubism, and frequently used Cubist forms in sequential arrangements to evoke movement. These allusions to movement, made explicit in Duchamp's rotoreliefs and his *Bicycle Wheel,* constituted much of the attempt to introduce into art the contemporary equivalent of literary content, since their references were inevitably mechanical, and hence modern. Frequently such references to mechanical movement added further literary levels by having organic congruences, as in Duchamp's *The Bride,* or Picabia's *I See Again in Memory my Dear Udnie.* Sometimes the joke was artistic rather than sexual, as in the *Large Glass,* which substituted an actual frame and window for the traditional picture frame and "window" and represented on it objects in perspective, which then seemed to exist in the actual space of the room inhabited by the Glass. Whatever their references, Dada's puns depended heavily on a context now past, and the structural alterations necessary to adapt what had been a Cubist technique to those puns weakened Dada, as it did Futurism, to the point where most of its products now seem hopelessly dated. When works so wholly dependent on their living context for impact are thrown back on their inherent materials they tend to fall apart if those materials are badly conceived or arranged. Puns cannot outlive the language that gives rise to them.

While Dada availed itself of the current artistic vocabulary, Surrealism increasingly detached itself from that vocabulary by returning to more traditional forms. It utilized one-point perspective, *chiaroscuro, sfumato* (infrequently), and all the Renaissance devices for unifying pictures internally that had been so vigorously under attack since the nineteenth century. By doing this, Surrealism detached itself from the living world around it in a way alien to Dada, and

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replaced Dada's puns with a sort of *correspondance,* or *double entendre,* that was at its most obvious in a work like Man Ray's *Violon d' Ingres,* and at its most banal in Dali's double images. Surrealism intellectualized Dada by using Freudian rather than artistic or mechanical references, and the search for subconscious meaning led to attempts at calling up specific emotions, as in Magritte's *Pleasure,* and eventually to the exploration of dream imagery. It was here that the dream and poetry became confused, for what these incantatory attempts to summon the subconscious failed to recognize was that emotional power in art is called forth not by will or magic but by direct and conscious struggle with the materials of one's art. Great pictures are made by an artist's wholly focussed and unselfconscious effort to mold his recalcitrant material into the shape he would give it, while he remains sufficiently open to allow the demands of the material and the moment to have their own share in the creative act. They are made, in other words, in a dialogue between what he thinks he wants to say and what his material would have him say. In that extended moment, great emotional reserves may be drawn on, but these are reserves that are either available to one or are not, and are impossible to produce at one's pleasure. As with so many matters relevant to contemporary art, Baudelaire saw this clearly, writing that:

> . . . to make a deliberate point of looking for poetry during the conception of a picture is the surest means of not finding it. It must come without the artist's knowledge. It is the result of the art of painting itself; for it lies in the spectator's soul, and it is the mark of genius to awaken it there. Painting is only interesting in virtue of color and form; it is no more like poetry than poetry is like painting—than the extent, I mean, to which poetry is able to awaken ideas of painting in the reader.[1]

By seeking an emotionally viable subject matter in subconscious imagery and returning ever more firmly to traditional techniques, Surrealism ended by weakening rather than strengthening itself, and the result is the emotional flaccidity that affects so much art engaged with consolidating gains rather than breaking new ground.

As might be inferred from its use of artistic devices that were all but discarded by the early twenties and its search for literary subject matter at a time when such subject matter was also all but discarded, the overriding sensibility of Surrealism is nostalgia. Its nostalgia is not that of, say, Renoir—a backward glance at past realities, the places and people of youth, the warmth of spring, etc. It is, rather, a pervading *sehnsucht,* that vague and unfulfillable longing for the indefinite, the infinite, the indescribable which for Edward

[1] Charles Baudelaire, "On M. Ary Scheffer and the Apes of Sentiment," ("The Salon of 1846"), *Art in Paris, 1845-1862,* Jonathan Mayne tr. and ed. (London, 1965), p. 98.

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Burne-Jones, decades earlier, had been the very definition of art. "I mean by a picture a beautiful romantic dream of something that never was, never will be—in a light better than any light that ever shone—in a land no one can define or remember, only desire."[2] Much Surrealist painting is the embodiment of this description, notably the proto-Surrealist Giorgio de Chirico's metaphysical pictures, such as *Melancholy of Departure,* or Max Ernst's forest pictures, such as *Europe After the Rain*—the titles of these works evoke their nostalgia and cue us as to the expected literary response. Nostalgia is also evident in most Surrealist-invented methods of facture. Ernst's *frottage,* decalcomania, etc. are all attempts to evoke vaguely familiar textures, to conjure up a physical past freed from specific connotations of time and place. Even Surrealist use of collage evidences this search for security in the past, culminating in Kurt Schwitters' *Merzbau.* In a succession of houses, Schwitters surrounded himself with the detritus of his and other people's existences, secreting an ever more elaborate protective shell.

Schwitters and his houses exemplify the desire of both Dada and Surrealism to identify art and life. Every tendency of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries has been toward definition and atomization, toward the establishment of art as one thing and life as another, and toward the distinction of the arts one from another. In its nostalgic effort to return to a past when the boundaries were not so clear, Surrealism constantly sought to make art of life and to make of life an art. Dada had done this by transforming objects of external life into objects of art by fiat, as with Duchamp's urinal and bottle-rack. Surrealism did it by trying to make objects of art out of the facts of internal life, painting dreams, etc., and by introducing into life and art objects with no clear relationship to either. In their dissociated substantiality, these Surrealist objects came close to being fetishistic. Be that as it may, the conflation of art and life, the *leitmotiv* of transformation, and the element of frivolous play which typifies both Dada and Surrealism bring both the works and the lives of their participants close to the condition of theatre. Significantly, the typical Surrealist painting display was more event than exhibition.

Every observation made so far on the art of Dada and Surrealism leads to the conclusion that both are forms of academic art.[3] Traditional academicism trades on and tries to preserve past styles, as do both Dada and Surrealism. It emphasizes the importance of literary content and "expression," as do the two more recent movements, sharing with them thereby a quasi-theatrical character (*tableau-vivant,* etc.). In its emphasis on allegory, it has definite analogies

[2] Clement Greensberg points out the parallel between Surrealism and pre-Raphaelite painting in his articles "Surrealist Painting," *The Nation,* (12 Aug. 1944), 192-193; (19 Aug. 1944), 219-220.

[3] Geraldine Pelles' *Art, Artists and Society* has an interesting chapter ("Style in Art and Life") on the roots of the art-life confusion.

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with themes of transformation. And in making sculpture basic to painting, and drawing to sculpture and thereby to both, it tends always to conflate the various arts and focus on side-issues, as do both Dada and Surrealism. There is, however, one great difference between traditional academicism and the phenomena of Dada and Surrealism. Traditional academicism has always taken a consistent and coherent stance opposed in both practice and theory to change and, in the nineteenth century, to the avant-garde. In theory, appearance, and life-style, however, both Dada and Surrealism not only participate in the avant-garde but form its most advanced element. What their practitioners say, and how they conduct themselves, is thus directly opposed to the evidence of their art. It is just at this point that Dada and Surrealism illuminate a phenomenon peculiar to the rise of modernism and the avant-garde: that they bear within them their own academy, the academy of the avant-garde.

I believe it was Benedetto Croce who first distinguished two strains in Romanticism, that which grasps life and that which flies from it. These strains are roughly analogous to the situations of the avant-garde and the academic as they evolved in the nineteenth century. Until then or, better, until the French Revolution, both the Academy and individual artists were flexible enough so that even a painter as "unacademic" as Chardin could comfortably be an Academician. Thereafter, it became rapidly apparent that the best and most advanced painting, the art of the avant-garde, was irreconcilably opposed to the painting of the Academy. Even painters who wanted as much to be accepted by the Academy as Manet, or who were as tempted by the Academic style as Degas, could find no common artistic ground with painters such as Gérôme or Cabanel. The painters of modern life could only grasp life as they saw it and deal with it in the unorthodox ways their consciences dictated. The Academicians could only fly from life into the artistic programs of the seventeenth century which they were committed to support. Thus far the battle lines were clearly drawn. But as early as the first inklings that an avant-garde was coming into existence, at the very beginning of the nineteenth century, there were already signs that it was to bring with it its own lunatic fringe, a third force that was to be a new kind of academy. From Maurice Quaï and his "Primitives," revolting from David's studio to dance naked in the Bois de Boulogne by the heat of trees to which they had set fire, to the first general public awareness of Bohemia, with the appearance in 1849 of Henry Mürger's *Scènes de La Vie de Bohème*, there gathered around the creators of the new art people who laid claim to the appellation artist, but asked to be recognized more on the basis of their life style than of their work. As early as 1803, Charles Nodier was able to conceive the character of Charles Munster, the hero of his novel *Le Peintre de Saltzbourg*, as that of an artist who produced not a single sketch, basing his claim to be accepted as

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an artist of genius on sensibility alone.[4] For the greater part of the nineteenth century such attitudes were peculiar to the life styles of students and hangers-on of the avant-garde, but gradually they began to express themselves in a sort of counter-art (Dada is sometimes called anti-art or non-art) which often had the look of high art, but not its substance, as Bohemia had the appearance of the artistic life but none of its reality. Both this counter-art and Bohemia were oriented toward the fulfillment of the general expectation of what art and the artistic life should be. By the time of Symbolism, late in the century, it was apparent that for each radical step forward in painting there was to be a corresponding counter-movement, perpetuating the newly-discovered style, embellishing it with literary values and an extravagant persona, and, in general, constituting a small academy for the style on which it traded. To Croce's two strains of Romanticism there had now to be added a third, not wholly different from the other two and attempting to straddle them both. This is the strain touched on by Robert Gutman when he noted that "among the many ambivalent characteristics of romanticism was the artist's desire for shelter in the objective security of an adopted style and his simultaneous yearning for subjective release through a revolutionary break with tradition."[5] This describes exactly the position of the academy of the avant-garde and its wish to have things both ways at once. Its key word is "ambivalence."

To return to Surrealism, which has always seemed so far-out but whose works are, as we have noted, so deeply academic, it is interesting to read the critical reactions to last year's exhibition "Dada, Surrealism, and Their Heritage" at the Museum of Modern Art. The adverse critics, who were in general supporters of Surrealism, attacked the show for merely presenting Surrealist works of art rather than attempting to evoke the Surrealist sensibility. Such criticisms are outright admissions of the weaknesses of Surrealist art, since they demand the suppression of Surrealism's visual artifacts in favor of an evocation of the spirit of the movement, acknowledging that if the art is presented in a museum in the same way as any other art, it loses impact. Put another way, this is to say that the impact of Surrealism is not so much in its art as in its taste, its style, and, conceivably, in its literature and ideas. Surrealism's adherents would revive the 1920's, but the 1920's are dead, and in so far as the art of Surrealism is merely exemplary of the taste of that time it too

[4] For this and other valuable facts and ideas about the Bohemian idea I owe a debt to Malcolm Easton's *Artists and Writers in Paris* (New York, 1964).

[5] Robert W. Gutman, *Richard Wagner, The Man, His Mind, and His Music,* (New York, 1968), p. 384. The word "revolutionary" here opens the important realm of relationships between artistic and political developments. In the only major exploration of the conservative viewpoint, Nikolaus Pevsner has written that "the academy is the obvious equivalent in art to the shapes which political organization took in absolutist states." (*Academies of Art Past and Present* [Cambridge 1940] p. 54.) There is already a sizable literature exploring liberal ideas, soon to be enhanced by Donald Egbert's *Social Radicalism and the Arts.*

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is dead. That is perhaps more than many people would like to believe. Revolutionary as the spirit of Surrealism may have seemed, its *art* is ultimately reactionary. It seems to be one of the paradoxes of modernism that truly revolutionary art comes in conservative, or at least quiet, guises, while what calls attention to itself as being new and different often turns out to be very old-fashioned indeed. This seems to be particularly true since the beginnings of the acceptance of modernism in the late nineteenth century, when the battles of the real avant-garde were beginning to be won.

Surrealism has not been the only academic mode clinging to the avant-garde. Symbolism, as we have noted, had something of this character, and more recently Pop, Op, and Minimal art have had it.[6] For every break with tradition—Manet, Cézanne, Cubism, Abstract Expressionism—there has been a reactive attempt to hold the line. Since each break has been toward the visual at the expense of the literary, each reaction has tried to maintain the newly developed visual language—its adopted style—and marry it to some sort of literary content. In each case, the works of these movements have been characterized by the emotional flaccidity mentioned earlier, but because each has had a certain very real human and theoretical appeal, that flaccidity has been glossed over, and purely artistic issues have become confused with matters of taste, charm, relations between art and life, etc. The human appeal that these movements have shown—they have tended toward an enjoyment of living, at the expense of artistic, events—has tended to devolve into acting and the theatre (Symbolist and Surrealist theatre, Happenings, etc.), and one has the impression that they are more at home in such an atmosphere, in which momentary events and assumed emotion can function meaningfully.[7]

The present position of the avant-garde and its academies is a strange one. Particularly in the last twenty-five years, the time lag between the appearance of a new artistic idea and that of its academic follower has become increasingly short. Whereas it took years for the visual effects of Impressionism or Cubism to be frozen into Symbolist or Surrealist works, more recent reactions to important breakthroughs have been almost instantaneous. Indeed, we seem now to have reached a paradoxical stage at which visual devices are actually developed and styles suggested by the academy before they

[6] Rosalind Krauss has written of the conservative character of Op art in "Afterthoughts on 'Op'," *Art International,* (Aug. 1965), 75-76. For a perceptive discussion of Constructivism along lines similar to those suggested here see Terry Fenton's "Constructivism and its Confusions," *Artforum,* (January 1969), 22-27.

[7] André Malraux has an extensive discussion of how western painting since the Renaissance has approached the condition of theatre in "The Museum Without Walls," the first part of his *Voices of Silence,* and Michael Fried has dealt with the theatrical quality of more recent art, with interesting observations on its hollowness (cf. "emotional flaccidity") in "Art and Objecthood," *Artforum* (June 1967), 15ff. The most notable recent defense of the idea of the *gesamtkunstwerk* is Jack Burnham's "Systems Esthetics," *Artforum,* (September 1968), 30-35.

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can be assimilated by the avant-garde. In this situation the very meaning of the words avant-garde and academy is called into question, and it has recently been noted by more than one critic that the avant-garde is dead. If this is true, and if originality is now the prerogative of the academy rather than of the avant-garde, it is time for a new terminology and a new concept of the relationship of originality to quality. Quality, which has always been the final determinant of what constitutes a high art, is thus put under greater pressure than ever before.

To come back again to Surrealism and qualitative judgments, it is apparent that what has been said so far constitutes a negative value judgment against academic art in general and Surrealism in particular. Regrettably, generalized qualitative judgments are at best misleading and at worst wholly inaccurate, so that while one can say of Surrealist painting that it is generally of less than significant quality, there are still important qualitative distinctions that can be made among different works. It is apparent, for example, that the more thoroughly the Surrealists absorbed Cubist structure the better their art, and that certain works of Picabia and the small-scale collages of Schwitters come off quite well. In general, collage seems to force a certain technical rigor on those who use it, and Joseph Cornell's box variations on it are among its more interesting manifestations in this country. De Chirico's metaphysical paintings are clearly superior to his later work for similar reasons, their abstract compositional force and convincing, if conventional, colorism. Often, as with more traditional academicism, Surrealist drawings—those of Tanguy, for example—are more convincing than work in other media. But the best works have been by artists who rejected programmatic Surrealism. It has always been true that any major work connected with academicism has been done by artists who may be tempted toward it but ultimately rise above it by force of their genius. Degas and Picasso are two such artists, and Miro is clearly the painter who stands in this relationship to Surrealism. There are, from his hand, a series of breathtaking open canvases from the twenties and thirties, notably *The Gendarme* of 1925, which may prove to be the painting that first made of Cubism a viable, large-scale, monumental art.[8] The presence of these pictures so close in time to more orthodox Surrealism makes one feel more strongly than ever the truth of Valéry's statement that those painters "whose glory has not been diminished with the passage of nearly a century were the ones in whom the will to work, the passion for their *craft* in itself, the wish to acquire an increasingly strong, subtle, and skillful grasp of its means, were virtues neither neglected nor sacrificed in obedience to the errors of their time."

[8] This is a distinction claimed for Abstract Expressionism by Darby Bannard in his excellent "Cubism, Abstract Expressionism, David Smith," *Artforum* (April 1968), 27-32.

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B. H. HAGGIN

Music and Ballet Chronicle

After years of Bernstein conducting the New York Philharmonic and Munch, Leinsdorf, Ormandy and Szell conducting the other great American orchestras, and with Lorin Maazel's mistreatment of Beethoven's *Eroica* and Daniel Barenboim's of this and other great classics last year still reverberating in my memory, it was refreshing and heartening to attend two of Colin Davis's concerts with the New York Philharmonic and hear what—except for Boulez's concert with the BBC Symphony a few years ago—one hadn't heard since the days of Toscanini and Cantelli: a conductor and musician of outstanding powers operating with complete unself-conscious absorption and impressive efficiency in his task of getting the orchestra to produce the realization he wanted of the work they were performing. I'm not saying that Davis's powers are of the awesome magnitude of Toscanini's and Cantelli's, and certainly not that his use of them produced performances which resembled theirs. Davis is a musician with a mind and taste of his own, who set a tempo for the first movement of the *Eroica* that was considerably less *con brio* than Toscanini's, but shaped the movement with unfailing continuity, coherence and cumulative power in that tempo; who also produced a Love Scene from Berlioz's *Romeo and Juliet* which moved slowly and with powerful expressive inflection, as against the animation and grace that Toscanini gave it, but which was effective and convincing in its own way; who, on the other hand, played the *Queen Mab* from *Romeo* faster than Toscanini and got the orchestra to execute the difficult piece with breathtaking perfection and brilliance. The movement beginning with *Romeo Alone* also was superbly performed, except that at the point in *Festivities at the Capulets'* where the brass proclaimed the earlier oboe melody of the Larghetto, the kettledrums, marked *mf* in the score, produced a thunder which obscured the festivities theme played by the violins and flute—something difficult to understand either as a miscalculation by a conductor with so excellent an ear for orchestral balance, or as the intention of so excellent a musician.

Davis's Berlioz program also included the early *Francs-Juges* Overture and *Cléopâtre,* the work that Berlioz, while still a student at the Conservatoire, submitted in his third unsuccessful attempt to win the Prix de Rome. In *Cléopâtre* the orchestra's very first measures establish what is evident throughout, but most notably in Cleopatra's invocation *"Grands Pharaons"* over the orchestra's powerful bass ostinato—that this is not a fumbling of unmatured powers but an operation with absolute assurance in a style that is completely individual and already completely formed.

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Another refreshing and heartening experience was young Claudio Abbado's conducting of *Don Carlo* at the Metropolitan. The precision of attack and inflection of the brass's opening statements demonstrated at once the control and authority one continued to hear in a performance which was disciplined in its impassioned shaping of the music—which, that is, kept the Verdi *espansione* within the limits of plastic continuity and coherence. And all this, again, with a complete unself-conscious concentration on his task that caused Abbado to whirl around with a gesture of furious protest when the audience's applause interrupted the musical progression at one point.

The cast included Nicolai Ghiaurov, his voice rougher than when I first heard it in *Faust* three years ago, as Philip, and Martti Talvela as the Grand Inquisitor, tremendous in their scene of confrontation; Gabriella Tucci, vocally and dramatically an excellent Elizabeth; Bruno Prevedi, his voice more agreeable and used with better taste than in *La Traviata* two years ago, as Carlo; Robert Merrill, an adequate Rodrigo; and Shirley Verrett, whose singing as Eboli was made unattractive by the harshness and strong vibrato of her voice, except in her final *"O don fatale,"* where its expressive intensity and its resulting enlarged vocal dimensions were overwhelming. As for her dramatic performance, it created the difficulty I have with Negro singers in white parts. When I wrote about this last summer the young critic Harris Green was one of several people who suggested that the difficulty might be remedied by make-up—though he added that present-day ideology might make it a matter of racial pride for a Negro singer *not* to use make-up. But Verrett's *café-au-lait* make-up didn't change the features which remained clearly not those of the white woman I should have been seeing. There are people whose imaginations are able to accept Negroes in white parts; but mine cannot. I believe that in law, medicine, the university, the symphony orchestra, direction of plays and films, and countless other fields, a Negro has a right to any opportunity he is equipped for; but when I am looking at what is presented on a stage my imagination cannot accept a Negro actress, however gifted, in the role of, say, Irina in Chekhov's *The Three Sisters,* and wouldn't be able to accept a Negro singer in the role if the play were made into an opera.

And after Abbado there was the considerably older Carlo Maria Giulini, whom I heard in two concerts with the New York Philharmonic. A Mozart program began with a graceful performance of four movements of the Divertimento K.251, which was followed by a suitably powerful performance of the Piano Concerto K.466; then, after the intermission, an eloquent realization of the musical gestures of grief, solemnity and resignation of the extraordinary Masonic Funeral Music K.477 was the prelude to a performance of the G-minor Symphony which had the impassioned character Toscanini's had had, but without Toscanini's fierce intensity, and with other differences of

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detail that made it clearly a product of Giulini's own distinguished musical intelligence and taste. The pianist was Arturo Benedetti Michelangeli, who through efficient press relations work at some point is always referred to as the "legendary" Arturo Benedetti Michelangeli, and whose later performances on records didn't change the impression I got from a 1948 performance of the Schumann concerto—that his playing demonstrated to what extremes wilful extravagance in tempo and dynamics and in distortion of phrase could be carried. This time I heard from two reliable listeners that at the Friday and Saturday concerts his playing in the Mozart concerto had been mechanical and lifeless; and so at the Monday concert I was unprepared for the forceful and disciplined playing he did throughout the work.

At the other concert Giulini began with an engaging Concerto a Quattro of Bonporti, tried in vain to impart interest to Schubert's immature and diffuse Symphony No. 4, and ended with Verdi's Four Sacred Pieces. Of these extraordinary products of Verdi's last years, two were composed before *Falstaff:* the fascinating *Ave Maria* that resulted from Verdi's trying his hand at constructing a contrapuntal piece for vocal quartet with a strange *scala enigmatica* published in a musical journal as *cantus firmus;* and the *Laudi alla Vergine Maria,* with lovely writing for sopranos and altos. And two were composed after *Falstaff:* the *Stabat Mater* and *Te Deum* for chorus and orchestra. Both employ the matured and refined style of the *Requiem;* but in the *Te Deum* the writing in this style has a conciseness and coherence it doesn't have in the *Stabat Mater,* and attains an incandescence of melodic, harmonic, instrumental and vocal invention that makes the *Te Deum* one of Verdi's most heart-piercingly, overwhelmingly beautiful works, almost unbelievable as the achievement of a man in his eighties. And Giulini's performance of it with the excellent Camerata Singers of Abraham Kaplan—after beautiful performances of the other three—gave it overwhelming effect.

Far from alerting the public to the extraordinary performances I have described, Donal Henahan, for one, informed readers of *The Times* that the *Don Carlo* I heard was "routine, flabby . . . conducted slackly and without passion by Claudio Abbado," and that except in the scenes involving Verrett and in Philip's monologue and confrontation with the Grand Inquisitor "the night rarely rose to even decent mediocrity." Harold Schonberg informed them that in Davis's performance of the excerpts from *Romeo and Juliet* "somehow the music lacked tension and bite. Rhythms were too inflexible; balances too one-sided. . . . There were a few sloppy examples of metrics, too, accented upbeats and the like." He also reported Giulini's unsuitably "elegant and classic" conducting of the powerful orchestral part of Mozart's K.466; and *The New Yorker*'s Winthrop Sargeant wrote that Giulini's Mozart program was "of a sort that almost plays itself, and he presided over it with a light, lyric approach," so that the con-

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cert was "an occasion for only moderate enthusiasm." Moreover, both Schonberg and Sargeant reported unusual accentuations in the opening statement of the G-minor that I didn't hear and that are not to be heard in Giulini's recorded performance.

Additional outstanding musical experiences were provided by Fischer-Dieskau in recitals presented by Carnegie Hall—the first a performance of Schubert's *Die schöne Müllerin* that was made deeply affecting, in spite of the dry, hard sound of the upper range of the voice, by the beauty of the voice lower down, the expressive eloquence with which it was deployed in the musical phrase, and the singer's evident personal involvement in each song. What sounded, at this first recital, like deterioration in the voice, turned out to have been only its temporary poor condition; for at the next recital the upper range had a restored glow and warmth. The program this time offered settings of poems by Goethe—not only familiar ones by Schubert, Schumann, Brahms, Strauss and Wolf, but unfamiliar ones by composers ranging from Zelter and Reichardt of the late eighteenth century to Reger and Busoni of the early twentieth, of which I found only Othmar Schoeck's *Dämmerung senkte sich von oben* beautifully made and expressively effective.

Also, the mezzo-soprano Teresa Berganza, in the Metropolitan's *Barber of Seville,* enchanted one with the style of her deployment of her delicate voice in melody, the ease and grace of her accurate delivery of florid passages. Her accuracy must have been embarrassing to Sherrill Milnes, the Figaro, who—required, in their second-act duet, to repeat a florid phrase of hers—each time produced a smear instead. Otherwise he used his fine baritone well, as did Luigi Alva his light tenor. Berganza's acting was as disciplined as her singing—in marked contrast to the excessive exuberance of Milnes and the coarsening of the other stage action originally devised by Cyril Ritchard. But the years hadn't made the Berman scenery less delightful; and Richard Bonynge conducted the musical performance well.

For the rest, the Carnegie Hall Festival of Visiting Orchestras gave me my first hearing in the concert hall of the Bavarian Symphony of Munich (or Orchestra of the Bavarian Radio in Munich) and its conductor, Rafael Kubelik. The orchestra is very good, with especially good brass, including a superb first horn who is an American, but with violins that haven't the luster we are accustomed to, and an extremely unpleasant-sounding first clarinet. And Kubelik conducted it in effective performances of works of Weber, Hindemith and Mahler.

The Festival also gave me an opportunity to hear the new Orchestre de Paris conducted by Martinon, which exhibited the perfect ensemble Harold Schonberg reported it didn't yet have, and produced blended and refined and unfailingly beautiful tone at all dynamic levels instead of the raw tone in quiet passages and the raucous noise in fortissimos that he reported. The novelty of the program was Mes-

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siaen's *Oiseaux Exotiques,* in which winds and percussion made sounds which I couldn't connect with birds or anything else.

The von Karajan stage production of *Das Rheingold* at the Metropolitan presented no such major obstacle to dramatic credibility and effectiveness as the huge tree in place of Hunding's dwelling in last year's *Walküre,* but only a few minor flaws. The opening scene of the bottom of the Rhine was superbly contrived by Günther Schneider-Siemsen; the Nibelheim scene was made impressive by the huge hoard in the center of the stage, at the top of which one saw a malignant Alberich who, when he put on the Tarnhelm, became invisible and was heard through loudspeakers at various points of the stage; and the large circular platform with a backdrop showing a range of mountains served the two scenes involving the gods and the giants adequately, until just before the end. Here Erda—instead of making her usual impressive appearance in the center of the stage—became visible in a green light at the back of the platform, where she looked like someone leaning on the parapet of her balcony to gossip with a neighbor. And there was no castle of Valhalla at the top of the mountains, so that as the orchestra played the majestic music for the entrance of the gods into their new home Wotan appeared to be leading them on a mere mountain stroll. Nor did I see any gain in the huge electronic noise before the Nibelheim scene in place of the noise of anvils specified by Wagner.

There was also a great difference in this year's musical performance, as against last year's understated *Walküre.* Though Schonberg reported hearing "as before . . . something resembling a chamber music performance," actually von Karajan conducted a *Rheingold* that was for the most part robustly sonorous. It was in addition a *Rheingold* excellently performed under his compelling direction by the orchestra and the singers, of whom Zoltan Keleman, the Alberich, and Gerhard Stolze, the Loge, were outstanding, and only the tremulous-voiced Freia of Simone Mangelsdorff was poor—the others including Thomas Stewart as Wotan, Josephine Veasey as Fricka, Lili Chookasian as Erda, Karl Ridderbusch as Fafner, Martti Talvela as Fasolt, and Sherrill Milnes as Donner.

Frank Corsaro's new stage production of *Faust* for the New York City Opera was like his *Traviata*—another of the vandalisms which not only this company but the Metropolitan and European companies have been inflicting on operatic classics, and which Mr. Bing has described as "presenting masterpieces as seen through contemporary eyes" ("eyes that are cross-eyed," someone added). From a recent article entitled *Method Verdi,* in *Opera News,* I learned that the Corsaro *Traviata* represented the influence of an Actors Studio workshop production of a director named Witcover, which embodied "fresh ideas" that "translated the opera . . . into contemporary life" and in this way made it "more meaningful." One accompanying photo-

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graph showed a "swinging party" of today in the first act in place of Violetta's elegant nineteenth-century affair—from which Corsaro derived *his* first-act party with girls running about pursued by drunken amorous men. The idea that the nineteenth-century dramatic situations and action in *La Traviata* cannot be meaningful to an audience today and must be "translated into contemporary life" is as untrue of this opera as it would be of a novel of Turgenev or a painting of Degas; and the results of its application to the opera are as atrocious as they would be of its application to the novel or the painting, or as they are of its application to plays of Shakespeare and Euripides in the productions described by Alan Levitan of Brandeis University in a review in the magazine *Boston*. Witcover and Corsaro are not the inspired innovators breathing new life into a moribund art whom one reads about in *Opera News* and *The Times;* they are men without any understanding of the essential nature and requirements of that art. In an interview in the New York Philharmonic program Giulini—pointing out that he had fought to modernize scenery and production in opera and had collaborated with Visconti and Zeffirelli—contended that Zeffirelli and many others were now going too far. "These designers and directors don't have enough confidence in the music. They think . . . that Mozart and Verdi are not enough. They do things to support an aria, because they don't believe it stands alone. . . . The visual part has become so important that the music of *Traviata,* for example, becomes like movie music—a comment, not the central issue." And Balanchine, who has staged operas in Hamburg, showed the same understanding of the music being the central issue, and the aria not needing the help of action, in his statement in an interview in *Opera News*—that in opera "while a person sings . . . he should just stand and sing," and there should be "minimum of gesture and movement, maximum of music." Because they don't understand this, directors like Witcover and Corsaro think they must help the aria with visual action that achieves the opposite of help—action "translating the opera into contemporary life" that draws attention to itself, which is to say away from the music.

It was from Balanchine that I got my first information about the new Corsaro *Faust* the day after the first performance. When Marguerite, he said indignantly, sang her beautiful aria in her garden after her first meeting with Faust, one didn't hear it because one was distracted by her struggling to take off her dress (of which Balanchine gave a vivid imitation). This was as much as he told me; the rest I saw when I attended a later performance. One thing I learned was why Marguerite took off her dress in the garden while she sang the ballad *The King of Thule.* In Gounod's own version of this act there is, facing the garden, a house, at whose window Marguerite, still fully clothed, appears at the end of the act to sing of her love for Faust, who is listening in the garden and is impelled to rush into the

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house. In Corsaro's version the garden rose to a house with its front walls seemingly removed by a tornado, revealing the bedroom with its bed; and Marguerite's removal of her dress left her in a filmy white garment in which, at the end of the act, she was pushed by Faust into the bedroom and onto the bed. Gasp-provoking? Yes. Necessary to make the opera meaningful? No. The same with changing Faust's study, in the first scene, to a dissecting room and having one of the corpses on the tables turn out to be Mephistopheles; and with the striking innovations in the other scenes, which achieved only their intended purpose of drawing attention to themselves and away from the music. This was performed adequately under Samuel Krachmalnick's direction by Patricia Brooks, Michele Molese, Joseph Rouleau and Dominic Cossa, among others.

And at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, finally, Handel's lovely *Acis and Galatea* was given a surprisingly finished and effective performance by the six singers—one of whom was compelled by illness to drop out at the intermission—and eight instrumentalists of the New York Chamber Soloists, with Albert Fuller at the harpsichord. Of the singers the best-known, the tenor Charles Bressler, was outstanding in the quality of his voice and the expressiveness and style of his use of it.

Not announced in the New York City Ballet's advance prospectus and schedule last fall, and slipped into three programs of a November weekend, was a new Balanchine *pas de deux* to music from Delibes' *La Source*. I was fortunate to be able to watch most of the pre-season rehearsals at which Balanchine devised the dance movements that as usual were beautifully suited both to the charmingly melodious dance music and to the particular dancers he was using—on the one hand the experienced Violette Verdy, on the other hand the gifted young John Prinz, for whom the piece was to serve in addition as material with which to learn increased elegance of style as soloist and skill as partner in a classical *pas de deux*. (This meant that I too learned something about what elegance of style in classical dancing and skill as a partner in a classical *pas de deux* involved; and the learning included the fascinating experience of seeing the details of elegant movement and skilful partnering demonstrated by the extraordinary practitioner of ballet movement and master of elegant style in this movement that Balanchine is himself. For years I have watched him do a movement he devised for a dancer more beautifully than the dancer for whom it was devised.) But I was unable to see the unpredictably scheduled last rehearsals of the two weeks before the first performance. And so there was on that occasion the surprise and pleasure of seeing Prinz execute with assurance and ease what I had last seen him still working at. But what was overwhelming was to see the movements Verdy had done with her exquisite perfection at rehearsals now done

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with additional excitingly beautiful inflections of toe and hand and subtleties of rhythm and accent—the idiosyncratic breathtaking elegances of style that distinguish her performance in the Tchaikovsky *Pas de Deux* or the first movement of *Symphony in C* from those of other fine dancers, and made *Allegro Brillante* and *Ballet Imperial* look like different works when she appeared in them after those others.

The new *La Source pas de deux* was unusual in structure: instead of the customary sequence of initial supported adagio, brilliant solo for each dancer, and brilliant coda for the two, it offered first solos by Prinz and Verdy, then their supported adagio, again a solo by each, and then a final waltz by the two. Even with a couple of brief musical interludes (which broke continuity) the sequence was so taxing that at the third performance Balanchine made a cut in the final waltz; and I expect to see changes when it is done again.

As special in his way as Verdy in hers was the young Danish dancer Peter Martins, who had made a few guest appearances with the company the previous year and was allowed by the Royal Danish Ballet to spend the entire season with it this year. What was special—in the first movement of *Symphony in C* with Verdy, in *Diamonds* and *Liebeslieder Walzer* with Suzanne Farrell, in *The Nutcracker* with Farrell, then with Allegra Kent, and in *Apollo*—was the quiet, unassertive manner of the operation that was at all times extraordinary, whether in the physical and the personal grace of his attentive and secure partnering, or in the elegant precision of his unstraining execution of brillant technical feats (made possible by reserves of physical strength). With the beauty of movement there was the golden-haired beauty of physical appearance; and together they gave an impression of beauty of spirit that ennobled the performances.

Substituting for Melissa Hayden, who in the *Jota Aragonesa* of *Glinkaiana* had participated in its parodying of Spanish style, Farrell danced in straight ballet style which had no relation to the parodistic context. But her clarity and suppleness and ease produced the most beautiful Sanguinic Variation I can recall, in a *Four Temperaments* which also offered Carol Sumner's superb Third Theme, and in which Francisco Moncion was powerful in presence and movement, but not phlegmatic, in the Phlegmatic Variation, John Clifford was sharp and vivid, but not melancholy, in the Melancholic Variation, and Renée Estopinal was rather bland in the Choleric Variation.

I found the Fracci-Bruhn *Giselle,* in American Ballet Theatre's season at the Brooklyn Academy of Music, even more impressive and affecting than two years ago. Fracci seemed to have added projective force to her exquisite dancing and expressive acting, and Bruhn to have increased the grandeur of his powerfully sculptured movements in the air, the authority and force of presence that enabled him to achieve so much with so little in his miming. I speak of the Fracci-

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Bruhn *Giselle,* because I imagine it is in its essentials a constant which in non-essentials is adapted to the various productions in which it is presented. This time it was the new Ballet Theatre production that was first shown at Lincoln Center last summer; and reading Clive Barnes's review of it at that time I was struck by the fact that although he had looked forward to it because it would eliminate the Berman scenery and costumes of the old one, he did not write a word about the new Oliver Smith scenery and Peter Hall costumes. And when, in December, I saw how mediocre and tasteless they were, this didn't explain why Mr. Barnes hadn't described invented excellences, as he had done in the case of Smith's scenery for *Swan Lake.* But he did, last summer, write his approval of David Blair's new staging; and my opinion is that it was a mistake for Blair to clutter up the early part of the first act with new details to make more realistic and plausible a dramatic situation which is basically so unbelievable—that the better procedure is to treat the action as the excuse it is for the dancing, and to cut it down to the absolute essentials required to connect one dance with the next. But I compliment Blair for one innovation: having the Prince's party resume the hunt, from which it is recalled by Hilarion's blowing of Albrecht's horn.

Fracci was charming, and Bruhn revealed that his dramatic gift extended to comedy, in the first two acts of *Coppelia;* and their climactic classical *pas de deux* in the last act was breathtaking. This addition to Ballet Theatre's repertory was staged well by Enrique Martinez, with adequate scenery and costumes by William Pitkin.

What effect these two classics had with other principals than Fracci and Bruhn I cannot report. But I did see Michael Smuin's new *Gartenfest,* which offered a no more than competent fitting of ballet movements to a minor Mozart piece. And I saw Smuin's excellent performance in the title role of *Billy the Kid,* with Ruth Ann Koesun's lovely performance in the *pas de deux* that is the high point of this American classic.

Bruhn in action can be seen in the many superb photographs by Fred Fehl accompanying the tape-recorded words in the booklet, *Beyond Technique.*[1] It is interesting to learn what goes on in the mind of a great dancer, not only when it is sensible but when it isn't—not only when Bruhn says an abstract classical ballet is not "just a matter of physical exercise, of the body moving," that "within that moving body there has to be a mind [which] . . . guides the movement," and when he discusses the ideas that guided his body in some of his roles, but when this mind, decreeing that "when you revive traditional ballets you have to look at them with the eyes of today," impels him to reject the original *Swan Lake* and replace it with a newly thought-out version in which, among other things, the evil spirit Rothbart is

[1] BEYOND TECHNIQUE, by *Erik Bruhn,* with photographs by *Fred Fehl.* Dance Perspectives. $2.50.

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changed into a beautiful woman, the Black Queen, since only such a woman could tempt the prince into his deception. And the photographs taken at performances enable one to see Bruhn's marvelous dancing—from the early Ballet Theatre *Giselle* and *Les Sylphides* with Markova to the recent *Giselle* and *La Sylphide* with Fracci, with the New York City Ballet *Nutcracker, Swan Lake, La Sonnambula* and *Panamerica* among the works in between. (One of the best things in the text is the paragraph describing how Balanchine made the *pas de deux* with Bruhn and Patricia Wilde in *Panamerica.*)

For lack of space I must defer comment on a far more important book, Edwin Denby's *Looking at the Dance,* the collection of his reviews and articles published in 1948 and now reissued,[2] except to say that it takes its place beside the theater reviews in Stark Young's *Immortal Shadows* and the reviews of music in Bernard Shaw's *Music in London* as the great and unique classic in its field, with its writing that is like theirs in its accuracy of critical perception and its discipline, and that is not only as illuminating today as twenty years ago, but provides today the necessary corrective to other writing that it did then. (Someone quoted to me recently a line in a routine of the entertainer Phyllis Diller about the food she had had in a Japanese restaurant, which seems to me to provide the suitable term for Clive Barnes's writing: "It was the *chic*-est garbage!")

The sustained perceptive observation and comment in Robert Garis's marvelous article on the great dancers of the New York City Ballet in a recent issue of *Partisan Review* is something no one should miss.

[2] LOOKING AT THE DANCE, by *Edwin Denby*. Horizon Press. $7.95.

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VERNON YOUNG

War Games: Work in Progress

> Here is such patchery, such juggling, and such knavery! . . . a good quarrel to draw emulous factions and bleed to death upon . . . .
> —Thersites, in *Troilus and Cressida*

WE ARE TODAY MORE THAN EVER being submitted to moral blackmail by film-makers who advance their fears or their whimpering pugnacity as radical social criticism. We should guard ourselves against tolerating these false Dmitris. . . . An object-lesson for me was my too trustful reception of the films of Peter Watkins. *The War Game* was, I do believe, conceived by Watkins in a genuine and pardonable state of terror. I should not wish to retract the strong impression it made on me when I first saw it. On the subject of *Privilege,* I had certain misgivings which I suppressed when I briefly discussed it in the pages of this Review. I was ready to believe that because he hated hateful things Mr. Watkins had an abiding affection for things that were lovable—an assumption long on generosity, if poor in logic. When I saw "The Battle of Culloden," made by Watkins for the TV, my misgivings increased. Very like *The War Game* in method (i.e., treated as if a TV interviewer had been present in eighteenth-century Scotland), the film suggested, on the part of Mr. Watkins, a compulsion to go a-hunting for doom in the past if he could not, at the moment, find a better equivalent in the present or in the immediate future. He appeared, on the dark face of it, to be demanding compassion for those who die in senseless battles (and God knows the deaths of the Scottish infantry at Culloden were senseless); yet an intuition, which I might not easily be able to objectify in a given sequence or line of the film, convinced me that his animosity (in this context, towards the military over-class at the time of Culloden) was far in excess of any pacifistic motives. Last September, Mr. Watkins arrived in Stockholm to shoot *The Gladiators* which, like *The War Game* and *Privilege,* will have its setting in a future as brutal as the past—that segment of the past, at any rate, chosen by Mr. Watkins to stand trial. At his press conference, into which I nosed, from professional curiosity, my worst fears were confirmed.

Rarely have I heard such a rush of ill-conceived and paranoid remarks as Mr. Watkins volunteered within the half-hour which embraced the limits of my attention. Without inviting anyone present to the courtesy of quizzing him first (the usual procedure), Mr.

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Watkins launched himself into a tirade which he hadn't managed to work off or talk out in England. First and last his grievances were inspired by the BBC for their having refused his film, *The War Game,* as a suitable diversion for their captive audience. He supposed that Swedish Television would be equally obdurate, then hastened to add that of course he knew nothing yet about Sweden, except that a Swedish company was backing his film. This kind of lunge-and-recovery was characteristic of his style of address thereafter. He had soon evoked a conspiratorial cloud that never assumed precisely discernible shape; from time to time it was much like a whale and very like a weasel. I'm not now certain in which order he delivered his lugubrious insinuations and his toil-and-trouble prophecies, since order was not a specialty of his discourse. Early, he declared that of course nobody could assume to predict the future (though doing so, cinematically, is a responsibility he has now taken on, himself, three times)! Five minutes later he was quoting statistics purporting to have scheduled a world famine to arrive in ten years; he was quite indignant that nobody was worried about it. Everyone, he asserted wildly, was sunk in apathy—not only were they unimpressed by the prospect of famine, they were also indifferent to the equal probability of their extinction in nuclear warfare, before famine could do its worst. I don't know what stoical company Mr. Watkins keeps in England but I couldn't help wondering how on earth he could describe as apathy what had been violently taking place everywhere in 1968. He plunged on, with a parenthetical tribute to "the students" who in Paris had been trying to reenact the Revolution (presumably *they* were exempt from charges of apathy). As there had been at least five factions of these students, each at ideological cross-purpose with another, this reference was as comprehensive as, and no more apposite than, his tiresomely sneering allusions to "the status quo," "the machine," "the system" and "the establishment". . . . *Which* system? Which *status quo?* The system of capitalistic interests, which makes it possible for him to produce films and have them distributed when the BBC is reluctant? The *status quo* represented by the audience members for whose survival he professes to fear? The establishment: Things as They Are (or were when we looked out yesterday)? or an interlocking board of directors somewhere? We learned, in any case, that this machine or system was a sinister thing and would go on forever; in the next breath he was assuring us that we'd be blown off the earth shortly. England was becoming more *Right* every day (he has news for Prime Minister Wilson) and one concluded from his tone that for some perverse reason this *Right* didn't *care* whether it was exterminated by nuclear warfare with all the others who are not *Right* but who'd rather be right than be alive and be *Right!* . . . You can scarcely appreciate the flavor of this fanatically delivered nonsense without an image of Mr. Watkins standing there—young, chalk-faced, burning-eyed, tight as a clove-

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hitch. I was reminded vividly of Illidge in Huxley's *Point Counter Point.*

Paul Valéry warned us some time ago that since the world takes the shape of the mind imprinted on it, the modern world, created in the mental image of modern man—inventive, unstable, vindictive and absurd—will become increasingly unforeseeable as it assumes the form of our minds' disorder. Mr. Watkins' mind is symptomatic; it is committed to total disorder, to disaffection and to a most unmanly panic. Happily, the films he makes are not yet as confused as his formulated opinions. *The Gladiators* may well turn out to be an enthralling film and so long as Watkins makes it easy for himself by confining his subject to that of fantasy, with a dash of bitters, or to the abuses of the Past, he may fullfil his promise as a distinctly talented director. If he expects to be persuasive in the forum, however, his talent will not suffice for the absence in him of common sense, humor and a modicum of respect for the spoken language he has inherited.

Yes—well! We know by now, don't we, that it's possible for a man to put together striking pictures in a narrative sequence, yet not have a responsible intellectual conception in his head? And that's no matter if he's not trying to instruct us in love and death or good government. Unfortunately we are just now besieged by young (for the most part) film-makers who have nothing to express but their hysteria and their contempt for nearly everything that fails to allay it. Jean-Luc Godard has taught a generation how to deceive critics into believing that if a film is *against* something, it doesn't matter how badly it is made. It can even be made well, if they insist! His own latest, *Weekend,* was inevitable. Even as before, a wishful, grinding thought Inside Godard was presented as if it were the voice of society: if the machine doesn't run fluidly, destroy it. Young Godard will soon be old hat but he is leaving a scattered lineage in every film-making capital, including those of the Eastern Bloc. Alexander Kluge and Richard Lester are of his party; both of them have acquired the false prestige of political artfulness and social acuity. Lester, I'm told, is funny; I don't find him so. And when he stops jump-cutting, horsing around and history-baiting, he's as unsurprisingly devoid of serious ideas as Godard, himself. Witness *Petulia:* an empty, meretricious film about empty meretricious people. Lionel Rogosin is cousin to the Godard sect, though he preceded its appearance. He discovered *cinéma verité,* so to speak, which Jean Rouch and his friends later claimed as their invention. There's little enough in it to lay claim to. Rogosin's first two films, made respectively in Manhattan and Johannesburg and dealing, respectively, with the daily life of alcoholic derelicts and the sub-social life of exploited Negro mine workers, were easily the most boring films of 1954 and 1959—respectively. They revealed ignorance masquerading as theory: the implicit belief that reality in art is of the same stuff as that reality which can be witnessed around you, with no intervention

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from mind. By 1964 Rogosin was in England, learning to put his mind on his art, but I fear it was too late. While *Good Times, Wonderful Times* (a bouncy title, stolen from a German postwar film) did at least have the benefit of a reasonably competent photographer and an alert cutting-room staff, this was insufficient to lend the film *moral* coherence. The procedure was the subject: it consisted of establishing a cocktail party in London (which had the air of being the real thing), then inter-cutting, from remote sectors of our troubled globe, a montage of crisis: Koreans, Africans and Vietnamese killing and being killed, suffering hunger, disease, torture. Meanwhile the cocktail party, to which we intermittently return, rattles on, the implication being that everyone present (except members of the film crew who did not, I wager, refuse the cocktails) was fatuous and irrelevant because he wasn't dying in the Congo, dragging his arse through a paddy-field or demonstrating in Trafalgar Square. One suspects that the purity of the accents being recorded was an integral element of Mr. Rogosin's nebulous accusation.

At any hour in history, equipped with a movie camera, you could assemble a profusion of villainous contrasts for an illustration of this kind, but what exactly would it illustrate? Always there is somebody dying while someone else enjoys the fullness of life (or does it dirt); always, while one creature is trapped in the fact, another is idling away his hours, in corruption or in innocence. We eat; others starve; and sometimes the reverse. We rot, as others prosper. People like Rogosin (there are *thousands* of him in our time but they don't all make movies) find it inconceivable that existence is contradictory. They presume to identify themselves with the poor, the oppressed and the outlaw, not because they want to make his concrete problem theirs, but because they, themselves, are poor, in resources, oppressed by incomprehension and self-outlawed by the conceit in their self-pity. Rogosin's film plays with juxtapositions, deceitfully or ignorantly offered as significant contradictions. Someone is to blame, he hints darkly, but he doesn't know whom, and his failure to find the short answer irritates him. He, as well as Watkins and Kluge and Lester and ever so many others, are demanding applause which they haven't artistically earned; they supply us with scapegoats we don't want and expect to be credited with sagacity. Characteristic of them all is their inability to create an image of decent man, personal to *them,* discovered in the subtleties of daily contacts and social collisions.

That moral imprecision is not a hazard limited to the New Left and the Young Wave (or vice versa) is fully evident in Ingmar Bergman's *Shame,* which also fails to pay its own way, trading instead with the public coin of chronic fear and of pity for the beleagured neutral—pity that costs nothing, since the situation glibly (if with fine craftmanship) evoking it, is marked, "Payment Deferred." The sum-

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marizing inference of the film—that there is nothing to choose between one antagonist and the other—may be a plausible negation when you have provided neither with cinematic definition. Given the time and the place in which this movie was made, however, together with the man who made it, such a conclusion smells to heaven of moral ignominy. . . . The title of the film couldn't be more just.

Anticipation of the worst, too long sustained, is demoralizing. Our great fear is that our behaviour under stress—of sickness and siege, of war and the other violations—will not support the illusions of courage on which our superegos feed. (Hence, the Swedish critics' acceptance, without a dissenting murmur, of Adam's rapid and unresisting degradation, in *Shame.*) Peter Collinson has recently contributed two essays on the devaluation of man which add to the ambiguities suggested by the films I have noted above. *A Long Day's Dying,* about three British paratroopers trying to break through a German encirclement, is in one sense an alternative rendering of Watkins' "The Battle of Culloden" and Lester's *How I Won the War.* Both Watkins and Lester would like to think that war is largely a game contrived and maintained by the military profession for their own aggrandizement. I suspect that Collinson, who seems tougher-minded than many of his contemporaries, might acknowledge an equally cold truism: that he is alive today, even as you and I, free to take the air, listen to Schubert and make or look at movies, because others died for us in wars that our side won before we were born. *A Long Day's Dying* suffers from the problem of reconciling the fact of heroism with the dirty, unheroic cunning required to survive the last ditch. Since Collinson wanted to assure us that his hero, trained to the hilt in all the commando strategies, does not actually relish killing (which is fairly incredible; he would have otherwise been washed out long before arriving at this oubliette), he supplies him with an off-screen inner voice, touched with poetry. While the picture continuity, as ruthless as any I can recall, captures the closeup dodges of murderous combat, this mellifluous prose, floating from the sound-track, tends to vitiate the reality (and is, besides, somewhat incongruous with the "pop" face of David Hemming). "I'm a pacifist!" screams the hero's thought as he hurls a deadly grenade. This is closer to parody than to pathos. The aesthetic insecurity, in itself, is not my point (the film is compelling, even so); it reflects an interesting irresolution of attitude, even more suggestive when you see *A Long Day's Dying* with Collinson's first film *The Penthouse,* in mind.

Adapted from a play, acted and directed with such conviction that we are hounded into giving its quasi-infernal content more value than it deserves, *The Penthouse* introduced us to a loving couple, a Mr. Average and his mistress, imprisoned in their flat-with-a-view by two criminal perverts with deceptively nance accents, ready knives

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and an infinite capacity for finding the soft places in the guts of their intimidated captives. The creeps tie the man of the house to a chair and proceed to fill his mistress with booze until she abandons her inhibitions and eagerly, wantonly, goes to bed with her captors. After some hours of sadistic trifling, the marauders take their leave, having forced the trussed-up male to the ultimate humiliation (on pain of their return) of swearing never to disclose that anything at all has happened to him. Since the limp victim has his own sweating fright to live down and his woman's concupiscence to cover up, he willingly consents to the vow of silence. . . . A social parable, then: the poor man's *Rashomon?* If we go along with the nasty argument, the generic female of our time is a tart; all she needs to prove it is an ample dosage of gin. And our representative male-animal is an invertebrate with nothing inside him but spongecake. There remain the smilers with the knives, who have what it takes to endure the battles of the Bulge. Perhaps I identify Mr. Collinson too closely with the *author* of *The Penthouse,* but he did make a film of it, did he not? and I scarcely suppose he did so with a gun placed at his temple by the producer. Questions about the nature of his commitments do impose themselves. I would say that his future as a film-maker is in doubt and I would add that it is a reasonable doubt. We cannot help wondering—as we do when faced with so many films today that importune our attention to the crucial worries—whether his inquests of domestic cannibalism and of man under fire are moved by pity, nausea or a species of cruel delight.

"History is a nightmare from which I am trying to awake," mused Stephen Dedalus. Our contemporary artists, in every medium, have taken him altogether literally. The resulting dilemma is only more visible in the movies. What do we do when we awaken, *without history*—which is to say, with a view of it as nightmare, *merely*—and with a present condition in which we find no more vital diversion than pornography, as unconsoling a game as war?

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STEPHEN FARBER

The Fixer

THE MOVIES INVARIABLY "discover" a novelist just after he produces his poorest work. Bernard Malamud is a gifted writer, and *The Assistant* seems to me a remarkable achievement, subtly controlled, tartly observed, harrowing, yet a genuinely poetic and compassionate vision of human pain. In *The Fixer* Malamud abandoned a world he knew firsthand to grapple with the Jewish Problem and the indomitability of the human spirit: a fictionalization of the case of Mendel Beilis, a Jew accused of the ritual murder of a child in czarist Russia. The result was a pretty disastrous novel, but a natural for the best-seller list, with just enough pretension for the Pulitzer committee and plenty of lurid thrills for the hungry suburban sado-masochists. The prison scenes in the novel, savored in rancid detail, are as sensational and as revolting as in any piece of pornoviolence I can imagine, but since Malamud's reputation had already been secured, sophisticated readers were quite prepared to suffer along with Yakov Bok. Even the novel's tepid liberal sermon about injustice and conscience is a fraud. Ostensibly a protest against hate and prejudice, *The Fixer*'s cartoon-simple pageant of Russian sadists and bigots reveals exactly the kind of small-minded stereotyping that it pretends to deplore.

Now John Frankenheimer, one of the most talented American film-makers working today, has fallen victim to the material. His film of *The Fixer,* though well photographed and well acted, inherits all of the weaknesses of the original. With a little less reverence for Malamud the film *might* have worked. The most interesting element in the novel was the characterization of Yakov Bok, particularly in the opening scenes. (These turn out to be the best scenes in the film too—Alan Bates perfectly captures Bok's timidity and self-deprecating sense of humor.) Malamud had done this character more fully before, and so had Saul Bellow, Philip Roth, Bruce Jay Friedman, and other Jewish writers. But to film audiences the character of the *schlemiel,* introverted, anxious, masochistic, may still be relatively fresh; only this past year, in Sidney Lumet's underrated *Bye Bye Braverman,* the first half of *I Love You, Alice B. Toklas,* moments of Barbra Streisand's performance in *Funny Girl,* have American movies begun to absorb some of the ethnic inflections of Jewish-American folklore.

But it was not the *schlemiel* hero of *The Fixer* that attracted Frankenheimer to the material. His films almost always deal with extreme forms of degradation, persecution, oppression, whether it is parental oppression in *The Young Stranger* and *All Fall Down,* political oppression in *The Manchurian Candidate* and *Seven Days in May,* or

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weird, inexplicable, almost preternatural oppression in the science fictional *Seconds.* And he has even done one other film about a man in solitary confinement, the excellent *Birdman of Alcatraz.* Frankenheimer is obsessively drawn to the figure of the victim, isolated, utterly defenseless, but struggling desperately to reassert his freedom against monstrous forms of tyranny. To say that there is something paranoid and masochistic in Frankenheimer's temperament is probably true, but those psychological labels do not help to understand his art. The pertinent point is that out of profound personal anxieties, he has created at least twice—in *The Manchurian Candidate* and *Seconds*—brilliant, original filmic nightmares of persecution. I felt that if anyone could salvage *The Fixer,* he could. I was not particularly looking forward to the film, but I thought it might turn out to be the definitive study of man in captivity. Instead, it remains a sluggish, morbid, pompous preachment.

The crucial question to be asked about the film, as about the novel: Why was it made? What is the purpose of *lingering* on the suffering of an abused Jew in pre-Revolutionary Russia? This may seem like a naive question; many people assume that the most awesome and uncompromising art concerns man's past barbarisms to his fellow man. I am not so convinced of the automatic relevance of watching the savagery of another era, and I should say that I am just as uneasy about most of the films that treat the Nazi experience: I resent the grim, gratuitous (though visually inventive) Czech film *The Fifth Horseman Is Fear* for essentially the same reasons that I resent *The Fixer.* It is supposed to be bracing to know of the atrocities that men have committed out of fear and hate and ignorance in this twentieth century. But we all do know by now. Does every reminder deserve our respect? Is it unreasonable to ask for some fresh insight, some illumination of our own society, or the human condition, or even the possible explanations for these atrocities? Just to *present* the atrocities is not illuminating.

Some of the best films ever made are historical fictions, but they do find a way of implicating us. Even simple horror films sometimes upset our complacency; *The Fixer,* gruesome as it is, only intensifies it. Audiences do penance for a couple of hours, devoutly acknowledging the wretchedness of the 1910 Russian Jew's existence, and then, cleansed of guilt, return to their newspapers and TV sets as stupefied as ever. The film doesn't connect with their own experience—it's too narrowly about a specific, remote time and place, and at the same time, paradoxically, too "universal," too general. It has no resonances, no aftertaste.

Of course it's easy enough to come up with some ringing statements about what *The Fixer* "really" means, but these probably don't have much to do with the experience of watching the film. For *The Fixer,* seizing at the prestigious laurels of High Art, in fact trades on the

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emotional responses of the very lowest. Who doesn't cringe at the closeup of a swollen, bloody foot or moan when a man is beaten to unconsciousness? Just as instinctively, the audience applauds when Yakov, ever humiliated, manages to score a minor point against his tormentors—identifying the Prosecuting Attorney's nose on a chart of "Jewish noses," or dressing up in prayer shawl and phylacteries to frighten off an idiot priest. The Torture Scene, The Triumph of the Underdog, even, for catharsis, The Martyr Thronged by Cheering Crowds—*The Fixer* is filled with familiar staples of pulp melodrama. These are the *easiest* responses a film can attempt, and the fact that *The Fixer* gets them should not be counted in its favor. The pity is that it so rarely tries for more subtle responses.

The screenplay was written by Dalton Trumbo, and it may not be farfetched to perceive an allusion to his own suffering under the notorious Hollywood blacklist of the McCarthy period: the scapegoat, innocent of all crimes, victim of a government's paranoid "international Jewish conspiracy" theory (the words are from the film), imprisoned and tormented because his ideas are alien. There are some leaden nuggets of political theory—people are united by hate, not love, and it serves the government's purpose if they hate the Jews rather than the czar—but it makes just as much sense to interpret the film's solemnity as Trumbo's self-pitying identification with the innocent man subjected to monumentally inhuman treatment. This interpretation does not, of course, make the film any more interesting.

Trumbo, always interested in themes of social significance, may have influenced the film in another, less obvious, but very important way. The express message of *The Fixer* is that Yakov Bok, through his suffering, develops for the first time a social and political conscience, a hitherto unfelt loyalty to the Jewish people, a sense of responsibility to his fellow man. As he tells the minister of justice "Something in me has changed. I fear less and hate more. . . . If the state acts in ways that are abhorrent to human nature, it's the lesser evil to destroy the state." His own degradation is supposed to have transformed him from a nonpolitical man into a quiet sort of political revolutionary. But at another point late in the film, Yakov's lawyer gushes, "It's a great honor to defend you," and Yakov replies determinedly, "It's just a dirty suffering. There's no honor in it." In fact, this is how the film looks to us—simply one dirty humiliation after another, without honor, without meaning. But then Yakov's passionate, defiant speech to the minister of justice seems incongruous. Is the imprisonment "just a dirty suffering" or is it a semi-heroic endurance that leads to a significant spiritual awakening? The film cannot really play for both cynicism and inspiration. It would be extremely difficult to dramatize an inner conversion, a growth of conscience and political involvement in any film. But it is *impossible* when another strain of the film—the desire to make the imprisonment

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look as dirty and gruesome as possible—is working directly against the conversion story. It is easy enough for Trumbo to write a few lines of dialogue in which Yakov *asserts* that a transformation has taken place, but film is a visual medium, and we believe what we see, not what we're told. A novel has an advantage in this respect because it *can* render the workings of consciousness. But the conversion motif was the book's biggest weakness too. Malamud tried to build the sense of Yakov's inner maturation through lengthy passages in which the fixer struggled with Spinoza, History, and Necessity or spoke sociology with a fantasized czar. These were the worst pieces of writing in the novel, because they did not belong to the consciousness of an ignorant handyman but were imposed from without, and written, besides, with all of the gassy awkwardness that usually overwhelms an artist when he wants to prove that he is also a philosopher. These monologues are luckily missing from the film, but nothing is there to replace them. Frankenheimer has been unable to find a way of visualizing an intellectual conversion, and so that conversion seems, as in the novel, merely a sop to the audience—a flimsy rationalization for all of the morbidity. Malamud and Trumbo and Frankenheimer piously raise their eyes to heaven at *The Fixer*'s finale; our eyes, unfortunately, are still on the shit on the prison floor.

What destroys the film is that Frankenheimer, fascinated by images of extreme suffering, cannot quite explore that obsession because he is burdened with Malamud's, and Trumbo's, and undoubtedly his own social pretensions. In a strange way I would have more respect for the film if it were a relentless, grotesque, hysterical study of confinement—in other words, more sadistic—because then the film would be truer to Frankenheimer's personal vision of oppression; and only this kind of intense personal document, even if shrill and overwrought, could unsettle us by touching on the unspoken terrors that we all share. But the film is too "tasteful," too "responsible" to abandon its flat message about political commitment for fullscale cinema of cruelty. That is, *The Fixer* is not quite harrowing enough to involve us deeply, not quite cruel enough to be invigorating; it is just cruel enough, basted with unctuous moral fervor, to be unpleasant and offensive.

I have written about the film at this length partly because I dislike it, but also because I admire Frankenheimer and am concerned about his career. Even in *The Fixer* there are sequences that show unmistakable cinematic talent—the violently edited pogrom at the start of the film, a tense scene in which an old Hassid guiltily, embarrassedly eats a piece of matzo in Yakov's room, the startling cut from dark prison cell to the brightly lit palace of the minister of justice or, later, to the open air of Yakov's village as he escapes in a moment of fantasy. Frankenheimer does beautiful things with editing, and he can make just the sudden appearance of sunlight very moving. But like most

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American directors, Frankenheimer is at a tremendous disadvantage, in comparison with European directors, because he does not write his own scripts. He is at the mercy of other men's ideas. And he is all too susceptible to the Socially Significant theme, as he has already demonstrated in *The Young Savages* and *Seven Days in May*. The careers of our talented directors are likely to be crippled because they are rarely given complete freedom to explore themes that concern them; they rarely have an opportunity to experiment or to grow. They must buy best-sellers, and work from scripts by men whose concerns may be subtly different from their own. It is little wonder that so many American films are so messy. Of course some of the mess in *The Fixer* can be attributed to Frankenheimer's own uncertainties. It may be a personal desire to imagine the victim's triumph over tyranny that leads him to put so much false emphasis on Yakov Bok's internal transformation. *The Fixer* is not the first of his films to have an uplifting ending. (It may not be irrelevant that his two best films, *The Manchurian Candidate* and *Seconds,* are tragedies.) But the commercial system in which American films are made—the stress on properties from other media, the hostility between the Writers Guild and the Directors Guild, the pressure to make large statements that can make millions quiver—places an unnatural burden on the creative artist. Any artist may fail because of his *own* confusions; but the artist-in-Hollywood has to reckon with the confusions of too many other people. *The Fixer* represents a particularly sad example of what the outcome is likely to be.

Notes on Contributors

EDWARD SEIDENSTICKER* is the translator of Kawabata's *Snow Country* and *Thousand Cranes* (Alfred A. Knopf). Mr. Seidensticker is at present living in Tokyo.

JOYCE CAROL OATES* has just completed a new novel, *Them,* which Vanguard plans to publish this Fall. Miss Oates is an Associate Professor of English at the University of Windsor, Ontario.

JOHN HAINES's next volume of poetry will be published by Rapp & Whiting, London, in the latter half of 1969. He is currently on a visit to the west and southwest, giving readings at several colleges. Mr. Haines makes his home in Fairbanks, Alaska.

OCTAVIO PAZ, formerly Mexico's ambassador to India, resigned his post in protest of his government's suppression of the 1968 student uprisings in Mexico City. GREGORY RABASSA* is a Professor at Queens College, New York. His translation of Julio Cortázar's *Hopscotch* won the National Book Award in 1967.

JOHN FREDERICK NIMS* is Visiting Professor in English and Comparative Literature at Harvard University.

DAVID PAUL FUNT,* a Fulbright fellow in France from 1964-66, spent the past four years living in Paris. He teaches in the Department of Philosophy at Columbia University.

(continued on page 164)

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HAYDEN CARRUTH

Spenser and his Modern Critics

WE WHO WERE BROUGHT UP to literature by the great poets and critics of the years before mid-century are inclined to regard *The Faerie Queene* with disdain—the longest poem in English! that allegorical bore! interminable rhymes! what ghastly pseudo-diction!—and hence to suspect its readers of callowness, pedantry, or worse. "The eccentric few," Eliot called them; while Leavis dismissed Spenser's poetry as "too simple a fact to need examining afresh." William Empson, that maverick, has been almost alone among recent British critics in his attention to the poem which after all is the acknowledged British epic. And though I may be wrong—I probably am but it doesn't matter, because my impression rather than my error is what signifies here—I cannot remember a single essay by a prominent American critic, Blackmur, Ransom, Tate, Burke, or anyone, which deals with Edmund Spenser.[1] Thus our disdain has a certain historical basis, which we in turn magnify by projecting it backward to the beginning. We have come now to look upon all Spenserians throughout literature as a breed apart, a secondary manifestation, inferior to the Shakespeareans, the Sons of Ben, or the admirers of Donne and Herbert. Oh, we are aware of Shelley's enthusiasm, of course, just as we may recall Milton's remarks in *Areopagitica* or Dryden's qualified approval in his essays; but these we easily wave aside. Consequently we are surprised to learn that Spenser, from a time well before his death until the present moment, has been the object of a vast critical attention, perhaps vaster, more varied, and more intelligent than that paid to any other poet in English; and we are positively shocked to find that the poem itself, *The Faerie Queene,* is not only readable but downright enjoyable—the whole 35,000 lines of it.

What kind of a poem is it? Certainly not the kind that many of us have been led to expect. First, it is not an ordinary allegory, not a piece of Aesopian fablery. Secondly, it is not dry-as-dust sermonizing, a versified *Pilgrim's Progress.* Thirdly, it is not an exercise in an

[1] Of course I do not mean to slight C. S. Lewis in England or Rosamund Tuve in America (or anyone whom I have overlooked). But although Lewis has written at length and enthusiastically about Spenser, the purely literary cogency of what he says is impaired by the undisguised religious base of his judgment, or at least it is for me; while in the case of Miss Tuve, her prominence has come only lately—mostly, alas, since her death.

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antique mode, for although in some aspects it may be "the last poem of the Middle Ages," in most its spontaneity and contemporaneity are what strike the reader with greatest force.[2] Fourthly, it is not a prettified and excursive chunk of Renaissance pastoralism, a versified *Arcadia*. Fifthly, although it is imbued with Christian and even churchly concern, it is not pietistic, not in the least, but is secular in its outlook, a poem of great psychological realism. In short Fairy Land is not the dream country that we may have been led to expect from our generalized knowledge of late-Renaissance pastoralism, as in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. It is our land, hard, multiform, unsatisfactory, greatly and poignantly beautiful. It is where we are right now.

And so on and so on: it is easy to say what the poem is not, much harder to say what it is; which explains the long critical labor that has attended it. From the beginning men of sensibility have tried to define the poem and their own responses to it: Thomas Rymer, William Temple, Sir Kenelm Digby, and many others of the time; thence into the eighteenth century, John Hughes, John Upton, Thomas Warton, Richard Hurd; and the nineteenth and early twentieth, through all the changes and ranges of romantic impressionism and philological severity. Much of this work is brilliant. I do not see how anyone who looks into even a little of it (which is as much as I have done) can fail to be struck by the human splendor of this love that only intelligence can display: so much warmth of heart engendered by great words on a printed page. I recommend, for instance, Thomas Warton's *Observations on the Fairy Queen of Spenser* (1752). Granted, parts of it seem laughable, especially where Warton tries to account for Spenser's appeal in terms which will not embarrass his neo-classical dedication to the *Ars Poetica;* but elsewhere I was astonished to see Warton's depth of insight and the acuity of his readings; and I believe that with respect to his methods at least, and very likely with respect to much of his substance, his work could be published today without apology. Then there is the Variorum edition of Spenser's works (Johns Hopkins, 1932). What its reputation among scholars may be I do not know, although they certainly rely on it. But for the general reader who wishes to have at his fingertips everything he needs in order to enjoy *The Faerie Queene,* including imaginatively selected excerpts from all Spenserian criticism up to 1932, the Variorum is a blessing and a perfection, a remarkable example of what humane scholarship can do.

My own experience of *The Faerie Queene* has been recent and intense. I had read only bits of it years ago, never the whole thing. Now I plunged in, and it was a marvelous experience. One by one, very quickly, my preconceptions fell away like dead leaves blown off in a

[2] The still common idea that Spenser's writing is overloaded with intentional archaisms was disproved some time ago. See B. R. McElderry's article, "Archaisms and Innovation in Spenser's Poetic Diction," *PMLA,* XLVII (1923), 144-170.

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breeze. I found myself going on—and on and on and on—with all a voyager's satisfactions of sensible novelty. Not that I wasn't confused. *The Faerie Queene* must be one of the most mixed-up poems in the world. Characters disappear in mid-story and never return, totally unrelated episodes are juxtaposed, the plot (if you can call it a plot) is so loosely organized that no reader could remember all its parts; yet the movement of the verse sweeps everything before it, so that one reads in perfect contentment, overwhelmed by difficulties of which one is scarcely aware. Many commentators speak of this, of being "entranced" or "carried away" by the poetry. But though I know what they mean I dislike their choice of terms, which seems to indicate that the reader is towed along by the poem in a state of shock. Nothing could be further from the truth; one reads this poem actively, almost aggressively, hungrily. And in spite of the bulk there is no surfeit. One reads as one breathes, and neither poem nor atmosphere ever seems too much.

For my part the greatest difficulty was with the rhymes. Four thousand Spenserian stanzas! Most modern poets would quail at the notion of forty. And of course the well-known paucity of rhyme sounds in English is at the root of the trouble. Sometimes I thought that if another stanza rolled into view with hight/pight/wight/night or sayd/ayd/apayd/upbrayd for its terminations, I'd heave the book in the fire. But this was usually when I had been reading for several hours and my strength was failing anyway; and as I read further I became less and less disturbed by the repeated rhymes, more and more appreciative not only of the need for such a stanza but of its suitability, elegance, and power; for only that stanza, with its intricate rhyme scheme and its total stop at the end, could impose order and limit upon a style which otherwise must be the most fluid ever conceived in English:

> High ouer hilles and ouer dales he fled,
> As if the wind him on his winges had borne,
> Ne banck nor bush could stay him, when he sped
> His nimble feet, as treading still on thorne:
> Griefe, and despight, and gealosie, and scorne
> Did all the way him follow hard behind,
> And he himselfe himselfe loath'd so forlorne,
> So shamefully forlorne of womankind;
> That as a Snake, still lurked in his wounded mind.
>
> Still fled he forward, looking backward still,
> Ne stayd his flight, nor fearefull agony,
> Till that he came vnto a rockie hill,
> Ouer the sea, suspended dreadfully,
> That liuing creature it would terrify,
> To looke adowne, or vpward to the hight:
> From thence he threw himselfe dispiteously,

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All desperate of his fore-damned spright,
That seem'd no helpe for him was left in liuing sight.

But through long anguish, and selfe-murdring thought
He was so wasted and forpined quight,
That all his substance was consum'd to nought,
And nothing left, but like an aery Spright,
That on the rockes he fell so flit and light,
That he thereby receiu'd no hurt at all,
But chaunced on a craggy cliff to light;
Whence he with crooked clawes so long did crall,
That at the last he found a caue with entrance small.

(III, x, 55-57)

This is Malbecco's last flight, after the final loss of his beloved, faithless Hellenore, and shows him being transformed, in an action far more complex and subjective than anything in Ovid's *Metamorphoses,* into the eternal personification of *Gealosie:* good Spenserian verse, some of his best, strong, supple, economical, and perfectly clear in spite of the difficulty of the material; but parse it if you can. Spenser's syntax is a curious combination of formalism with informality, at once elaborate and casual, like nothing else in English. His connectives are often merely that, all those *that's, whom's, wherein's,* and *whenas's* linking together illogical constructions, full of ambiguities.

Nought vnder heauen so strongly doth allure
The sence of man, and all his minde possesse,
As beauties louely baite, that doth procure
Great warriours oft their rigour to represse,
And mighty hands forget their manlinesse;
Drawne with the powre of an heart-robbing eye,
And wrapt in fetters of a golden tresse,
That can with melting pleasaunce mollifye
Their hardned hearts, enur'd to bloud and cruelty.

(V, vii, 1)

Whose is the "heart-robbing eye," beauty's or the warriors'? Yet we hesitate not a moment in the reading, for the ambiguities are open and simple, like the flow of words, and never forced.

Fluidity and simultaneity, these are the qualities of Spenser's verse, giving us, in this four-hundred-year-old poem, a feeling of great presence; and isn't this exactly what our poets today are striving to achieve in their purposely fragmented writing? But because, in the centuries since *The Faerie Queene,* we have become so habituated to logical or pseudo-logical speech, their efforts seem mostly awkward and destructive—forced indeed! To Spenser it came naturally; and as I followed his verses I became more and more aware that what I was reading was essentially a modern poem.

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This seems to be the statement, bizarre as it may seem, toward which the critics are reaching, toward which they have been reaching for two hundred years; though as usual they are chary about it. Of course the ambiguities of the verse and the uncertainties of the allegory have required a long period of groundwork in conventional explication and textual study. I suppose the pinnacle of this work, or one of the pinnacles, was Josephine Waters Bennett's *The Evolution of "The Faerie Queene"* (Chicago, 1942), a remarkable book. With immense learning Mrs. Bennett put together all external evidence, historical, biographical, and literary, to reconstruct Spenser's writing methods during his twenty years of intermittent work on *The Faerie Queene,* and although some of her conjectures are doubtless far-fetched, her general conclusion seems unimpeachable; namely, that Spenser did not write *seriatim,* as most previous critics had inferred, but instead "planned and wrote in episodes and narrative sequences which he fitted into his larger plans as best he could, replanning the whole, probably more than once, and rearranging and revising his materials as his plans matured." Certainly this is what any working poet, after looking at the size and scope of the poem, would conclude off-hand, though Mrs. Bennett's argument, derived wholly from non-subjective materials, is no less fascinating for that. In fact one point which I find offensive in the work of younger critics, who in the past decade have begun to approach *The Faerie Queene* from a new starting place, is their nearly unanimous scorn for Mrs. Bennett and her colleagues of thirty or forty years ago, especially since their attitude is so unnecessary: Mrs. Bennett's conclusions and theirs are by no means incompatible. Even Paul Alpers, who of all critics has least cause for a grudging view of his predecessors, having produced a "pinnacle" himself, is not immune from it.

The title of Alpers' book, *The Poetry of The Faerie Queene,*[3] is somewhat misleading because Alpers is not concerned primarily with Spenser's verse, but rather with his meaning. Indirectly, however, the title is justified because Alpers finds the meaning in the poetry. Does this sound simple-minded? Nevertheless Alpers is operating at a notch above anything in previous Spenserian criticism. Consider the preconceptions which he must knock down in order to make his argument; for him the meaning is not in the narrative sequence, not in the fiction, not in the sermonizing, not in the play of character, not in the pictorial or iconographic representations, and neither in the moral nor in the historical allegory; all which have been cornerstones of prior Spenserian explication. Instead, Alpers argues, the meaning is in the poetry, i.e., in the figures and formulas that Spenser has chosen to express the values about which his feelings cluster. Alpers writes: "For Spenser the meanings of locutions and formulas are inherent in them, and are as independent of a putative speaker

[3] THE POETRY OF *THE FAERIE QUEENE,* by *Paul J. Alpers.* Princeton University Press. $12.50.

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as they are independent of specific dramatic situations within the poem." In short the poem is not its explicit content but its rhetoric, and its meaning is a psychological meaning, a shifting evolution of human attitudes and states of feeling, arising from the conflict of values expressed in the poem's verbal flow. The meaning ascends above the poem, so to speak, and floats there like a luster between the reader and the obscure actions of the narrative. "The poetry is a mode of understanding, not of experience."

Consider the typical "event" in *The Faerie Queene*. A knight undertakes a quest, the achievement of which will represent his attainment of a particular virtue: holiness, temperance, etc. On the way he is beset by misadventures, usually involving combat with other knights or with dragons or monsters. Now three points must be made. First, these "actions" are perfunctorily described and their outcome is never in doubt; sometimes the descriptions are so vague, so detached from the narrative fiction, that if we read them literally we have hardly any idea of what is happening. Secondly, the opposing knights or monsters are almost always personifications of weaknesses within the hero's own personality, which he must overcome in order to attain his quest. Thirdly, the hero himself is a personification, never a character; at best a generalized human force, part of the fabric of social and metaphysical destiny in which all our emotional values take form. Putting these three observations together, Alpers shows that the meaning of the poem, or the poem itself in the true sense, moves above and around these token actions with a fluidity which exactly corresponds to the fluidity of the verse. It is, in effect, a modern poem, a meditative lyric, whose meaning, or value, is engendered not in its objects or its symbols but in its shifting patterns of rhetoric.

Of course Alpers overstates his case, as he must if he is to differentiate clearly between what he is doing and what has been done before. Actually it would be strange indeed if Spenser had constructed his labyrinthine allegory for no purpose but to sustain his word-spinning; surely *some* of the meaning is allegorical. But Alpers has performed a great service in showing how the full meaning escapes the allegory. For by 1580 no allegory, even Spenser's, could support the complex feelings in the minds and hearts of men, and the pressure of this excess was precisely what induced the human overreaching that we now call poetry in the full sense of the term, viz., the *creative* use of language. Poetry entails belief; its growth is a function of declining traditional faith, or alternatively a displacement of faith into new (and human) sources of creative energy. Thus we have *The Faerie Queene,* a modern poem, a very human and existential poem, and above all an accessible poem. And thus we acquire a weapon to use against the whole tribe of critics who would deny us our access, the allegorists, numerologists, iconographers, and others who insist on the

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poem's mystifications. Of these the latest is Frank Kermode, who has argued brilliantly that Spenser's conscious aim was to conceal his meaning, just as the Provençal poets, according to Denis de Rougemont, made their erotic poetry into concealed analogues of the heretical Albigensian liturgy. But this is brilliance wasted; for whatever may be the case with the troubadours, we know from our immediate experience of the poem that Spenser's purpose was the opposite of esoteric. His whole attitude is a plea for easy understanding, and his poem, though assuredly complex, is as open as the skies.

Another recent and helpful book is T. K. Dunseath's *Spenser's Allegory of Justice in Book Five of The Faerie Queene*.[4] Dunseath sets out to rehabilitate the fifth book from the nearly universal deprecations of previous critics, who have found the quality of writing in Book Five a falling-off from that of earlier books, and who have complained of the excessive bloodthirstiness of Artegall and Talus as they pursue their quest of justice. As to the former, I myself was conscious of no decline in Spenser's power as I read into the second half of the poem, although there is an evident change of tone. On the contrary I felt the writing of the last three books to be generally better and more lively and varied than that of the first three, although in individual passages the judgment would not hold up. Indeed, for my taste the opening canto of Book Four contains the most versatile and workmanlike narrative writing of the entire poem. At the same time in Book Five I was shocked, I confess, by the way Artegall and Talus, who is less a "gentle squire," on the pattern of earlier episodes, than Artegall's henchman and enforcer, lop off heads and push people over cliffs and spread decimation in their path, all in the name of justice; and I was shocked also by Spenser's virulent suppression of libertarian political concepts. But I overcame my shock quickly. We must remember that if Spenser was a true Renaissance man, loyal to the idea of The Prince, his only alternative in late sixteenth-century England would have been some form of sectarian and puritanical separatism, which could scarcely have produced *The Faerie Queene*. Dunseath, shrewdly and convincingly, analyses each of Artegall's adventures to show how the knight purifies himself of various aspects of injustice, until he becomes what his name implies: Artegall, Arthur's Equal—a point previous critics seem not to have appreciated. Thereafter the two, Artegall and Prince Arthur, actually join forces to complete their quest together. This tells us a good deal, not only about Artegall, but about the shadowy figure of Arthur both here and elsewhere in the poem. Spenser has introduced Arthur in each book as the ultimate masculine representative of generalized virtue, or what Spenser calls magnificence (magnanimity); but by the time he came to Book Five he had clearly begun to regard justice, not magnificence or the more chivalric virtues of holiness or chastity, as the

[4] SPENSER'S ALLEGORY OF JUSTICE IN BOOK FIVE OF *THE FAERIE QUEENE*, by *T. K. Dunseath*. Princeton University Press. $7.50.

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great subsuming virtue, and Arthur/Artegall as its great champion. This strongly reinforces the secular and existential meaning of the entire poem, and gives us a clearer notion of its structure. For if we must impose a "structure" on the poem which Spenser left unfinished—he had orginally contemplated twelve books, or possibly twenty-four—then it seems to me that the first five books make a natural unit. In the fifth book, as Dunseath points out, all the previously unfinished business of the poem is brought to an end: the marriage of Florimell and Marinell, the betrothal of Britomart and Artegall, the conclusion of many secondary love quests, the final unmasking of Duessa, the recovery of Guyon's horse and Florimell's girdle, the humiliation of Braggadocchio, the dissolution of False Florimell, etc. Book Five, the Legend of Justice, is the end and apex of the poem's entire opening thrust, and Book Six, with its new material and its excursion into pastoralism, is like an epilogue. In a surprising number of ways Spenser's Book Six is analogous to Shakespeare's *Tempest*.

One point which Dunseath, in his scholarly reserve, fails to make is the clear application of Book Five to ourselves. We can read it, and we do, far more sympathetically than other readers of the past century have read it. Spenser, we are told, wrote most of Book Five after he had returned to Ireland from a visit to England in 1590, a visit during which he had been greatly disappointed, not only in his personal ambitions, but in what he saw at Court. The dreams of the early Elizabethan years, dreams of a great and glorious and virtuous realm, had vanished, to be replaced by venality and corruption and bitter competition in the ruling hierarchy. Spenser must have been writing in a frame of mind very similar to ours. We too need only look around us to see that in a land without justice no other virtue, public or private, can flourish long; we too are deeply aware of the need for action. I hope we can do without Talus, and perhaps even without Artegall in the hesitant stages of his quest, but can we carry on much longer without an Arthur? Many passages of Book Five strike home to us with unequivocal force.

Dunseath is careful in his choice of terms: Book Five is a culmination, not a denouement. In this undramatic poetry there can be no climax of involvement. When Dunseath says that Spenser's "is a poetry of awareness, not resolution," we are reminded of Alpers' statement that "the poetry is a mode of understanding, not of experience." This is the dominant theme of the new Spenserian criticism. It is the controlling idea, for instance, in Roger Sale's *Reading Spenser: An Introduction to The Faerie Queene*,[5] which is a small book, satisfactory as far as it goes and in effect a reduction of much material in Alpers' book; but I wonder if, in the case of *The Faerie Queene*, these introductions, guides, and pedagogical manuals serve a purpose. I believe

[5] READING SPENSER: AN INTRODUCTION TO *THE FAERIE QUEENE*, by *Roger Sale*. Random House. $5.95.

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that even for rather inexperienced readers the best course is to plunge directly into the poem. Plunge in and keep going. And the same applies to the criticism: we should forego introductions and begin with one of the "pinnacles," Alpers' or Mrs. Bennett's or some other, it makes no difference; quickly one book will lead to the rest. Nor should we neglect the criticism, which is not only fascinating in itself but essential to the poem. Because *The Faerie Queene* is a mode of understanding first of all, and because understanding functions on many levels and from many points of view, no single reader working on his own can hope to discern more than a small part of the poem's meaning. At the same time the criticism is necessarily held close to the poem by the nature of the task, since here our understanding is wholly verbal and the poetry is everything; nothing can distract us from its splendor. More than two hundred years ago Warton concluded his *Observations* by writing: "Much of the pleasure that Spenser experienced in composing the *Fairy Queen,* must, in some measure, be shared by his commentator; and the critic, on this occasion, may speak in the words, and with the rapture, of the poet." I too can think of no conclusion more fitting than to borrow, with Warton, those words and that rapture.

> The waies, through which my weary steps I guyde
> In this delightfull land of Faery,
> Are so exceeding spacious and wyde,
> And sprinckled with such sweet variety
> Of all that pleasaunt is to eare or eye,
> That I, nigh ravisht with rare thoughts delight,
> My tedious travell doe forget thereby;
> And, when I gin to feele decay of might,
> It strength to me supplies, and chears my dulled spright.

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ROBERT GARIS

Fiction Chronicle[1]

Yevtushenko and Voanezhensky call Solzhenitsyn the greatest living Russian author, but I haven't much confidence in their literary judgement, and Solzhenitsyn's much talked about and highly praised *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* left in my memory little beyond a respect for its quiet air of truthfulness. But Solzhenitsyn's more ambitious novels, *The Cancer Ward* and *The First Circle,* which have been suppressed in Russia, seemed to promise something more impressive than the true testimony of the earlier book. So it was disconcerting to discover, when I read these long novels, that although Solzhenitsyn is beyond question an immensely honorable, movingly simple-hearted (and sometimes startlingly simple-minded) man, his specific talent for fiction is undistinguished, to say the least, and his style is what you wouldn't be surprised to find in a novel on the American best-seller list, where in fact *The First Circle* has been occupying a respectable position for seventeen weeks now, as I write. In the first chapter of *The First Circle* State Counselor Second Rank Innokenty Volodin (young, successful, rising fast in the system under Stalin's rule) is trying to decide whether or not to warn the important scientist who used to be his family's doctor against sharing the fruits of his research with a French colleague:

> If all this had involved some other professor of medicine whom he didn't know personally, Innokenty would never have thought twice about trying to warn him. But Dobroumov!
>
> Could there possibly be a way of identifying a person speaking over a public telephone—if one wasted no time and hung up and left quickly? Could they recognize a voice over the phone? Surely there was no technique for that. . .
>
> It was more logical to wait. It was more reasonable to wait.
>
> Oh, God! A shudder gripped his shoulders, so unaccustomed to such burdens. It would have been better if he had never learned about it. If he knew nothing about it, had never learned. . .

1 THE FIRST CIRCLE, by *Aleksandr I. Solzhenitsyn.* Harper & Row. $10.00. THE CANCER WARD, by *Aleksandr I. Solzhenitsyn.* The Dial Press. $8.50. NARCISSUS AND GOLDMUND, by *Hermann Hesse.* Farrar, Straus & Giroux. $5.95. BENEATH THE WHEEL, by *Hermann Hesse.* Farrar, Straus & Giroux. $4.95. THE LONDON NOVELS OF COLIN MACINNES (CITY OF SPADES, ABSOLUTE BEGINNERS, MR. LOVE AND JUSTICE), by *Colin MacInnes.* Farrar, Straus & Giroux. $7.50. THE SLEEP OF REASON, by *C. P. Snow.* Scribners. $6.95. THE BEASTLY BEATITUDES OF BALTHAZAR B, by *J P. Donleavy.* Delacorte Press. $6.95. MOOD INDIGO, by *Boris Vian.* Grove Press. $4.95. BRUNO'S DREAM, by *Iris Murdoch.* Viking. $5.75. LOST IN THE FUNHOUSE, by *John Barth.* Doubleday. $4.95.

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How, indeed, could anyone condemn what Dobroumov had promised? It showed the generosity of a talented man. Talent is always conscious of its own abundance and does not object to sharing. . . .he ran out into the raw twilight, finding relief in action. . .

But all this didn't matter any more. In the past few minutes Innokenty had felt a calm descending on him; he realized clearly that he had no other choice It might be dangerous, but if he didn't do it. . .

If one is forever cautious, can one remain a human being? . . .

Try to do it as quickly as possible! Say it as briefly as possible—and hang up. Then the danger will be minimal.

Innokenty went straight ahead. A passing girl glanced at him.

And another.

Every disappointment about Solzhenitsyn's story and style that this opening chapter warns you of turns out to come true. Volodin does in fact make the phone call, a new technique for identifying voices speaking over the phone is in fact just being developed, and Volodin is arrested. As for style, the remarkably simple terms in which Volodin's decision is presented remain Solzhenitsyn's normal way of dealing with his characters' thinking, feeling and acting; and Solzhenitsyn's structure turns out to be a patchwork of such vignettes held together and moved forward in routine fashion by tepid suspense about Volodin's fate and by one other line of action. And because of all this I wasn't very interested in *The First Circle* while I was actually reading it. Yet I am more than grateful for the circumstances that made me keep on reading. For as this mediocre novel unaccountably stayed in my mind, I realized that the extreme ordinariness of Solzhenitsyn's talent and technique had obscured my sense of his whole temperament and cast of mind, which gradually came to seem to me far stranger and more interesting than I had thought. And this non-novelist's need to write, and his uncommon sincerity in writing, gradually came to function as standards against which I measured the motives of some far more gifted writers, a procedure which is, I am aware, as unfair as it is irregular, but it proved to be irresistible.

Most of the pages of *The First Circle,* and by far the best, are devoted not to Volodin's case but to the conditions in the acoustical-laboratory of the *"sharashka,"* the forced-labor prison where highly trained scientists who have been imprisoned for thought-crime are developing the new technique through which Volodin's crime against the state is finally apprehended. This *sharashka* is the "first circle," the Limbo of the Soviet penal system, and Solzhenitsyn's carefully worked-out analogy is in many superficial aspects apt enough: like the inhabitants of Limbo, the prisoners in the *sharashka* are for the most part "neither sad nor joyful," their eyes are often "slow and grave," they live in "desire without hope" and they are almost with-

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out exception noble in character. But the point at which the analogy breaks down is precisely the point at which we become aware of the curious quality of Solzhenitsyn's mind. The prisoners in Limbo have, in Dante's mind, been justly sentenced, whereas those in the *sharashka* without a single exception have not been. But while Solzhenitsyn is perfectly firm in condemnation of this injustice, it is so unexcited a sentiment that it gradually comes to seem less and less important, until we become aware that what we are encountering is in fact very close to being a Utopia. Now it will be granted that the mind for whom such living conditions are Utopian is a very curious mind. What is even more curious is the fact that we don't for that reason come to think of Solzhenitsyn as either morbid or in any very important way broken in spirit.

The prisoners in the *sharashka,* like those in Limbo, are in no physical discomfort. The food is adequate, there are plenty of cigarettes; the fact that the prisoners can go to the toilet any time they want to seems at first only ironically comfortable in contrast to the brutal regulations in the lower circles of the Soviet inferno from which most of the prisoners have ascended, but this freedom comes to seem a positive amenity; and the same thing is true about the long working hours and the barracks-like eating and sleeping arrangements. For unlike the prisoners in Limbo—oppressed by their awareness of God's great plan of salvation from which they are eternally excluded, eternally fixed in their melancholy, moving slowly like walking statues if at all, their only utterance the sigh of desire without hope—Solzhenitsyn's prisoners do not experience the analogous oppression you expect, the oppression of the psychological horror of totalitarian imprisonment. Before Hannah Arendt we might have reasoned that the scientific work being done in this prison is important enough to the totalitarian state to discourage anything beyond token terrorism; but we have so effectively learned the lesson that such rational good sense is not in the spirit of totalitarian rule that at first it seems that Solzhenitsyn simply isn't telling the truth when he shows us that what the prisoners suffer moment-by-moment from the system depends entirely on the *individual* temperaments, and tempers, of the officials, most of whom turn out to be permissive, and some, actively friendly. But Solzhenitsyn convinces us completely. Security measures, for instance, are very strict but laughably so, and nothing will communicate Solzhenitsyn's surprising attitude better than the quality of his irony on this subject: "No [prisoner] had the right to stay one second in his workroom without the supervision of a free employee because prudence dictated that the prisoner would be bound to use that unsupervised second to break into the steel safe with a lead pencil, photograph its secret documents with a trouser button, explode an atom bomb, and fly to the moon." As for these "free employees," young women members of the secret police who have been hastily and badly

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trained as technicians, they all have personal and even sexual relations with the prisoners, and the officials never make any trouble about their subsequent perfunctory or ingeniously misleading reports about the prisoners' conversation. And the general impression given is that all the prisoners who aren't remaining faithful to their wives are involved in some such relation with one of the free employees, who, while not remarkably pretty, all possess highly attractive qualities of personality and spirit.

All of this might sound merely negatively comfortable, though actually Solzhenitsyn's tone works against even this effect. But the thoroughly Utopian elements in this life are, first, the fact that the prisoners are genuinely interested in their work, and second, that even the long working hours allow plenty of time for conversation, and in particular, philosophical discussion, which is the center of life in the *sharashka* and in Solzhenitsyn's mind. In Limbo, Aristotle sits "amid a philosophic family," but we hear nothing, understandably, about continuing discussion in a place where all the answers are so sadly resolved. This is happily by no means the case in the *sharashka.* Here, for instance, is how the prisoners' life strikes one of the nice guards:

> Best of all, Nadelashin loved to hear the arguments and conversations of all those gray-bearded academicians, priests, Old Bolsheviks, generals, and amusing foreigners. It was his duty to listen in, but he listened also for his own satisfaction. He would have preferred to listen to a story from beginning to end: how someone had lived previously and what he had been arrested for. But because of his duties he never succeeded. He was astonished that in the dread months when their lives were shattered, their fates decided, these people found the courage to talk not about their sufferings but about any subject that came to mind: Italian artists, the habits of bees, wolf-hunting, how someone called Carbusier (or something) was building houses for other people somewhere.

The whole novel supports this view. And the conversation isn't limited to what's going on in Western culture. In the philosophical discussions criticism of the Soviet regime is continuous and freewheeling, and though Solzhenitsyn's point is certainly that such freedom is possible only in prison, the curious thing is that he never tightens the screws of this argument to produce the kind of irony we would expect. Nor do I believe that it's merely a fault in technique that is responsible for the fact that the emphasis on the intellectual freedom in the *sharashka* never flips over into a powerful ironic attack on the society which is responsible for this state of affairs. The specific conditions of life outside the prison make such freedom impossible in *specific* ways, but at the same time there is the general implication, tacit but perfectly incontestable, that life in *any* society outside prison would likewise inhibit intellectual freedom. For philosophical debate

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within the *sharashka* is carried on with a Utopian lack of acrimony, and also a Utopian lack of the necessity to achieve finality. Playfully theatrical indignation occasionally inspirits the debate, but Rubin, the only Communist, who still firmly supports Stalin and the system and regards his own imprisonment as a bureaucratic mistake, is a general favorite among the other prisoners. It is true that there is something close to real anger in his debates with his most energetic opponent, Sologdin, who believes that the age of chivalry was the high point in human history—"a magnificent triumph of spirit over flesh! An incessant striving, sword in hand, toward sacred goals!"—but the preposterous distance between these two positions turns the debates into comic quarrels between two cranks which leave all the realities of Soviet life untouched.

Two elements appear to work against the sense that life in the *sharashka* is Utopian. It is possible to be paroled if one is willing to work on special projects, usually involving an improvement in the techniques of the secret police; on the other hand, if you are offered such a chance and refuse it, it is possible that you will be returned to one of the lower circles where the inadequate food and the brutal physical labor are likely to lead to early death. But Solzhenitsyn is very confusing on these two issues. Gerasimovich angrily refuses to work on a secret-police project to develop an infra-red camera: " 'No! That's *not* my field!' he said in a clear high voice. 'Putting people in prison is not my field! I don't set traps for human beings! It's bad enough that they put *us* in prison.' " But he isn't sent down for this refusal. One of his reasons for both considering the possibility and not considering it involves his dying wife; and it is typical of Solzhenitsyn that Gerasimovich is becalmed between an intense desire to see her before she dies and an equally intense and final conviction that "when her life flickered out, his, too, would be over." An even more confusing case is that of Gleb Nerzhin, whose decision not to work on a new project does in fact lead to his being sent down to a lower circle. Nerzhin is the main character in the novel, and it is the drama of his choice, along with the drama of Volodin's imprisonment, that carries the action forward.

Nerzhin is a thirty-one year old mathematician who is beginning an affair with the free employee Simochka, though he breaks it off after he gets an unexpected chance to see his wife Nadia and reaffirm loving fidelity with her. In the *sharashka* he works contentedly on routine, though high-level, applied mathematical tasks; but he has been a highly gifted theoretical mathematician in the past and is therefore sought out by one of his former professors to work on a high priority project in cryptography. Nerzhin's reasons for refusing seem to have nothing to do with ethical distaste for the work itself; it is rather that the longer hours and the return to pure mathematics won't leave him time for the kind of "contemplation" that has become all-important

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to him, and quite explicitly more important than the prospect of reunion with his deeply-loved wife. Solzhenitsyn presents the choice as difficult and painful, but in no way that I can see does he suggest that Nerzhin's decision is either wrong or hard to understand, nor, again, do we feel that any very pointed indictment of the Soviet state is being made. Nor will the life in one of the lower circles interfere with contemplation. Nerzhin's choice, then, is in effect the choice to enter a different order of monastic life, and Solzhenitsyn approves it.

The strangeness of this is compounded by the fact that Nerzhin's contemplation is no high, intense and rigorous intellectual or spiritual exercise. Nerzhin entertains contradictory schemes and modes of thought alternatively and even simultaneously, without feeling the pain of dilemma, and yet there isn't, on the other hand, any suggestion that his philosophizing is a game. One of the most puzzling chapters in the book traces the successive phases of his interest in a Tolstoian conception of the people. As a proud young member of the scientific and cultural elite, he had scorned "bookshelf" idealization of the people. In the war he had unpleasant and contemptuous relations with the people when he himself was in a lowly position, but when he became an officer, he suddenly found the people under his command "obedient, loyal, industrious" and when they listened to his propaganda talks they became "his own small personal People." Then in his first imprisonment he had been "horrified" as members of the elite rapidly "degenerated into traitors, beggars, and hypocrites" and therefore he "tried to acquire from simple working people the wisdom of capable hands and their philosophy of life. And so he came full circle back to the fashion of the previous century: the creed that one must 'go to the people.' " And then Solzhenitsyn remarks:

> Yet it was not quite full circle. Nerzhin . . . had one advantage over our grandparents. Unlike those cultivated nineteenth-century aristocrats, he did not have to change his clothes and feel his way down the staircase to go to the people. Instead he was tossed down among the people . . . shared the life of the people not as a condescending and therefore alien gentleman, but as one of them, no different from them, an equal among equals.

This is clearly Solzhenitsyn's voice we are hearing, and Nerzhin's thinking throughout is just as clearly the author's. And it isn't very distinguished thinking, you will agree. The distance between the Soviet elite and the people is at least as great, and as hard to bridge, as the distance between the nineteenth-century aristocrat and the peasant: the only bridge is the energetic sincerity of individuals, a rare quality but just as conceivable for the nineteenth-century aristocrats as for the Soviet elite, most of whom after all became traitors, beggars, and hypocrites in prison. And so what we take to be irony in Solzhenitsyn's description of "Nerzhin's advantage over our grand-

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parents" is only half-ironic at best, and the passage is essentially an argument for imprisonment. In the *sharashka* Nerzhin establishes a good relation with one of the people, the carpenter Spiridon, whose philosophy is "land and family," and whose critical view of the Soviet system is the simplistic proverb " 'The wolfhound is right and the cannibal is wrong.' " Nerzhin will presumably continue to learn from the people in the lower circles, but, just to add to the confusion, Solzhenitsyn never suggests that the people are the real and full answer, and Nerzhin will apparently continue his forays into the possibilities of scepticism, Taoism and other modes of seeking for the meaning of life.

Well, there it is, in all its muddle and inconsequence. You can hardly call such a philosophy of life "eclectic" for even a word so often used euphemistically implies a higher degree of rigor, and a greater awareness of being judged than what you find in Nerzhin and Solzhenitsyn. But Solzhenitsyn's lack of self-consciousness about being judged is part of his strange distinction. His choice of willing alienation from the business of life, from any of the projects of life, his commitment to contemplation, this is the only consistency in him, and it shows up just as clearly, though much less powerfully and interestingly, in *The Cancer Ward,* the subject of which my reader can by now predict for himself. What I keep trying not to imply is that Solzhenitsyn's naively simple-minded view of life is valuable just because it is so decidedly his own, but I wonder why it should be so wrong to say that. It's a rare enough thing to meet in anybody past a certain age. And that's the other point: Solzhenitsyn isn't, on any page of this novel, sophomoric: he isn't callow, cocksure; he isn't under the illusion that he's bringing you news, he doesn't shout or wave his arms. It's merely that every word he writes is guaranteed by his own experience. One can see that it's his unaggressive but unshakable individualism, together with his lack of interest in politics and his interest in a church-less and dogma-less religious contemplation, that alarmed the Russian censors; and one can understand, too, the American reviews that were also alarmed by these strange qualities and then helplessly took their clue from this sort of thing in the publisher's blurb: "It is a sublime hymn of praise to man, an outpouring of love and pride, a celebration of nobility, courage, selflessness, honor." Let me take my clue from James' wonderful sentence about Mrs. Capadose in "The Liar": "she had no imagination and only the simpler feelings, but several of these had grown up to full size." If Solzhenitsyn were a good novelist he might be a great one; in any case, he is a human being grown up to full size.

Hermann Hesse's *Narcissus and Goldmund,* which purports to be a philosophical fable about the relation between abstract thinking and art, is the work of a professional artist who never grew up. Hesse's

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smooth textures, his sophisticatedly abstract medieval setting, his sustained *andante moderato*—none of these is to be had for the asking; and the archetypal simplicity with which Narcissus stands for the thinker, Goldmund for the sensualist and artist, is a knowingly calculated genre-effect. Gravely, elegantly, most correctly attired in his priest-of-art robes, Hesse places before us this precious distillation of a lifetime's thinking and feeling. Here is Narcissus, the thinker, instructing Goldmund on the latter's perfections:

> Natures of your kind, with strong, delicate senses, the soul-oriented, the dreamers, poets, lovers are almost always superior to us creatures of the mind. You take your being from your mothers. You live fully; you were endowed with the strength of love, the ability to feel. Whereas we creatures of reason, we don't live fully; we live in an arid land, even though we often seem to guide and rule you. Yours is the plenitude of life, the sap of the fruit, the garden of passion, the beautiful landscape of art. Your home is the earth; ours is the world of ideas. You are in danger of drowning in the world of the senses; ours is the danger of suffocating in an airless void. You are an artist; I am a thinker. You sleep at the mother's breast; I wake in the desert. For me the sun shines; for you the moon and the stars. Your dreams are of girls; mine of boys. . . .

Hesse's control of genre kept me from open laughter when I read this twaddle in its context; and I can plead too that the passage occurs toward the beginning and that I was willing to let a famous, and to me unknown, artist set up his own rules. It never occurred to me, of course, that some dialectical tension between Narcissus and Goldmund wasn't in the cards. But Goldmund never falls behind in this contest, nor is he ever for a moment challenged. What on earth is this book about? Hesse is an artist, like Goldmund, and delicate little sense-impressions scattered throughout show that he uses his eyes and ears. Yet the book couldn't feel less like an artist's self-glorification. It is, in fact, Narcissus who wrote the book, which is not in the least a philosophical fable about the relation between abstract thought and art but a sensitive adolescent's hopelessly yearning fantasy about unreachable manhood. Hesse avoids both embarrassing self-revelation and banality by literary tact, but it's all negative, a business of delicately erasing the more blatantly vulgar and voyeuristic emphases in Goldmund's sexual and artistic exploits, and the more overtly self-pitying emphases in Narcissus' sensitive loneliness. But the substance of the fantasy remains. *Beneath the Wheel* (another new volume in the Farrar, Straus and Giroux complete translation of Hesse) is a very early (1906), completely negligible novella about the piteuos failure of yet another sensitive and impotent adolescent; its feeble verisimilitude gives us the real story of which *Narcissus and Goldmund,* written in 1930, represents the factitious sea-change that an artist's professional expertise can effect.

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Nat Hentoff's introduction to Colin MacInnes' *London Novels* protests against labelling these novels sociological or documentary or journalistic. His argument is that since *City of Spades* was written in 1957 and *Absolute Beginners* in 1959, they ought to seem dated when read in 1969 if those labels are accurate; because they don't seem dated, he wants them called works of the imagination. All right. But my interest quickens more readily these days at the prospect of a sociological or documentary or journalistic novel than a work of the imagination—it depends quite a lot on whose imagination is in question; and in my present Solzhenitsyn-mesmerized condition I welcomed novels that somebody, apparently, had described by those three adjectives so distasteful to Mr. Hentoff. Such novels might conceivably have a clear and strong motive behind them. And this Colin MacInnes does have. The motive is closer to curiosity than to anything deeper or nobler, but again, curiosity isn't so common in writers as one would like, though all of us readers self-flatteringly presume we have plenty of it. Mr. MacInnes' curiosity is energetic; he is a good kind of journalist, a real leg-man who wants to find out what it's really like; and if what he wants to find out about is what's already in the newspapers, that's fine, too. *City of Spades* is about the Negroes in London and the sympathetic but fairly inept officials who are responsible for the red-tape involved in their immigrant-status; *Absolute Beginners* is about mod youth in swinging London, though it gets into the race-issue too; *Mr. Love and Mr. Justice,* less front-page stuff, is about a prostitute, her ponce, a member of the police vice-squad, and his mistress. I found all three of these novels absorbing, I learned a lot of probably true and very satisfyingly specific details about where people lived and did their drinking and what they ate and how they amused themselves, and I came away with so favorable a sense of Mr. MacInnes' intelligence, good humor, energy, adaptability and unemphatic tolerance that I took his word about the deeper matters of happiness and unhappiness in the lives of the newsworthy people he writes about. This is crucial, for though there is plenty of violence and squalor in these novels, the overall view is far from depressing. Here Mr. Hentoff's argument may indeed have a certain relevance, since I should very much like Mr. MacInnes' opinion as to whether the race and youth picture right now in London gives ground for as much cheerfulness as he was able to feel in 1957 and 1959. But as for Mr. Hentoff's point about Mr. MacInnes' imagination, I don't see the issue. His imagination needn't be more than garden-variety of a high order to do adequate service to his intentions, though it must be added that his whole cast of mind is so remote from the new-left mentality as to seem in the current climate virtually apolitical, which is to say that to new-left readers he will seem to have no imagination whatsoever. Instead of the major *literary* imagination that Mr. Hent-

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off seems to be claiming for him, Mr. MacInnes makes do very well by picking and choosing wisely among what is already in stock. The officials in *City of Spades* show that Mr. MacInnes has read the comedy of Waugh, Powell, Amis and others with intelligence and he has used this reading to good effect: these familiar comic figures—faintly overbred, unenergetic, silly and privileged, but fundamentally decent and generous—nicely set off the superior energy and freedom but also the more disturbing insecurity and susceptibility to disaster of the blacks—and yet this is accomplished without doing dirt on the whites. In the less successful *Absolute Beginners,* Mr. MacInnes adopts a first-person voice that may be an imitation of some English imitation of Salinger that I'm not familiar with, but maybe I'm doing Mr. MacInnes' originality an injustice; in any case, the imagination at work here seems to be trying a bit too hard to honor the teenagers' code and the genuine discriminations that code makes about both duties and pleasures, and the result seems in consequence more anxious to understand than sure of its understanding. *Mr. Love and Mr. Justice,* extremely interesting and matter of fact about the manners and morals of its prostitutes, ponces and policemen, is the most serious in theme of the three novels, and simultaneously the least successful both in argument and in fictional technique. The technique in fact breaks down completely on many occasions, yielding to long essays disguised only in the most rudimentary way as dialogue; and yet even this strategy doesn't help the argument, and I am never convinced that Mr. MacInnes' idea about the important secret similarity between the life of the ponce and the life of the policeman is anything more than a bright idea. But if most of the novels one reads gave one anything as interesting even as this unconvincing idea, not to mention MacInnes' wealth of information, reading novels would be a lot more interesting than it usually is.

C. P. Snow's *Strangers and Brothers* used to offer, along with sluggish action, sawdust characterization and uninterrupted self-importance, some moderately interesting documentary and journalistic information about proceedings in the various corridors of power through which the author has passed. Almost nothing of the sort appears in the latest installment, *The Sleep of Reason.* Perhaps Lewis Eliot, now that ripeness is all, is above interest in the machinery that brought him to eminence, though we hear more than enough pointedly modest self-congratulatory talk about the wide swathe he has cut in the world. But those who go to Snow to see how power works will read the new book without a *frisson.* Snow is again meditating on that "darker" side of life to which he has occasionally in the past, conscious of his position as ambassador between the two cultures, turned his complacent attention. Disorder, death, inexplicable evil are the subjects. Four dark events are clumsily interwoven and insensitively equated:

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Eliot's father dies; Eliot himself is afflicted with a detached retina; he fails to persuade an old friend, the Vice-Chancellor of the University in his home town, not to take the "correct," but in this case disastrous, strong line in a discipline case involving sexual relations between students; and he gets involved, primarily as an observer, in the trial of two Lesbians who have tortured and murdered a young boy (this is, of course, a modified version of the famous murder case to which C. P. Snow's wife, Pamela Hansford Johnson, has also given her attention). Snow's entire inadequacy to his theme and the consequent nullity of his achievement make extended criticism impossible: criticism needs an object. What can be pointed to is the impertinence of expropriating Goya's sublime phrase as a title, and there is a practice within the novel which is worse than impertinence: Snow augments his own brand of muffled, reticent British head-shaking about what it all means and where it will all end by making reference to Auschwitz. The great name is invoked without amplifying commentary, an illustration of Snow's awareness of matters of taste which of course only accentuates his lack of either taste or self-awareness. And yet I suppose the final effect is of simple lack of intelligence.

I don't understand the subject of J. P. Donleavy's new novel and I was almost driven to madness by its language, beginning with the title: *The Beastly Beatitudes of Balthazar B.* (The stakes have been raised since the last novel, where the opulence only got as far as *The Saddest Summer of Samuel S.*) But on this question of language I feel like Rip Van Winkle; while I was sleeping everybody learned to enjoy a new kind of literature, in which a writer like John Barth or Joseph Heller invents a highly-mannered style and then writes about a million words in it. I have two problems in handling this new mode. As far as I can make out the theory, this style is relished precisely for its spontaneity, but after just a few pages my mind becomes obsessed with a vision of the author chained to his typewriter, forced by unseen powers to fulfill, even if possible to exceed, an inhumanly large production-quota. My second problem is even more Kafkaesque: I don't understand when and why enough is enough; these books seem to me deliberately shapeless and in any case so long that I soon lose all capacity to perceive any conceivable shape they might have, so I never understand why they end when they do; yet everybody else seems to understand this perfectly, and there is universal agreement that *Catch-22* and *The Sot-Weed Factor* and *Giles Goat-Boy* are exactly the right length. *Balthazar B* is shorter than these and a bit easier to tolerate, though of course I may be improving myself. Donleavy's style I first took as an imitation of the beginning of Joyce's *Portrait,* but a riper gaminess soon set in:

Made of sudden love this gurgling baby shook tiny tender limbs in ecstasy. Wheeled to the Bois across summer, fists encased in woolly

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> whiteness, skies passed more blue than cloudy beyond the folds of gauze. Under leaves and green, nannie sat near knitting on her folding chair. She waved away the mosquitoes and bees and welcomed butterflies. And each day at four, in the thickest hot stillness, we headed home for tea.

Donleavy has to talk like this for 403 pages, and I presume that is exactly the right number to achieve the right spontaneity.

Balthazar B himself is a kind of farce-version of Dostoevski's idiot and I never understood why this is interesting or important or what it means. He is very rich, polite, handsome and generous; almost everybody likes him, though some people take advantage of his wealth and mildness, but this never gets very unpleasant; he has success with women, is very well-endowed sexually and enjoys sex (the novel has been praised for representing heterosexual love as a pleasure, and I can see that there is some distinction in this achievement) but his love affairs don't work out. His mother understandably enough breaks off his first affair, when at the age of twelve he is willingly seduced by his twenty-four year old governess, Miss Hortense, a splendidly tall English-movie-star type. But the brief experience has been idyllic:

> And her hand felt and took his hand and she pulled him gently down. Her fingers up through the short hairs on the back of my head, and cool they touch in behind my ear. Tumbling down into her arms she whispers out o God come to me. Her kisses over my mouth. Over the cheeks and eyes. Her tongue along the side of my neck and deep into my ringing ear. All the bells of Paris. And stormy choirs sing when it is not yet mass or Sunday but her silky long slender arms, smooth wrists, and soft slim hands.

A later romance with the "earthly God forbidden splendour of Elizabeth Fitzdare," another movie-star type, doesn't work out because the girl dies of brain-concussion. The rather muscular tennis enthusiast whom he is trapped into marrying isn't very agreeable, but his money eases their separation. Balthazar's steadiest relation is with his wonderful friend Beefy, a sexual athlete with whom he has comical adventures in Dublin and London; but in the end they, too, part; for it appears that Balthazar's generosity has proved too embarrassing to Beefy. But none of these disappointments explains the sweetly lyrical *tristesse* which infects Balthazar and nothing explains why I should care about his being so rich and so sad. A couple of episodes are at first brilliantly funny because the mannered lyrical style suddenly works by sounding like dead-pan humor: this effect may have been what engendered the whole book. But even these funny parts go on long enough to give you another glimpse of the chain keeping Donleavy at his typewriter.

The dust-jacket on *Mood Indigo* reports that Boris Vian "died in

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1959 at the age of thirty-eight. As novelist, poet, and playwright, he had little success during his lifetime with the publication of his works. He was, as well as a writer, a singer, composer, jazz musician and critic, translator, and engineer. His literary reputation has grown so greatly since his death that he is currently one of the 'cult' figures in French letters." *Mood Indigo,* which the dust-jacket also tells me is Vian's masterpiece, was in fact finished in New Orleans in 1946 but apparently not published until 1963, under the title *L'Ecume des Jours.* I think I can see how it all happened. Vian's little nonsense-pastoral is as mildly funny, as inoffensively silly—in short as inconsequential—now as it must have seemed in 1946. But a change in literary fashion, together with a certain coincidence of subject and a calculated misreading of Vian's tone and manner have sufficed to turn this little cream-puff of a novel into a Precursor of Pop-art, after which the formation of a Vian-cult was a foregone conclusion. The subject-matter Vian might be thought to share with Pop-art is his acceptance of consumer-culture, but the effect doesn't really feel like Pop at all. Vian falls short of the sternness of the radical Pop-esthetic, on the one hand; on the other hand, he hasn't a glimmer of the Beatles' energetic enjoyment or exhaustive knowledge of pop-culture, much less of their extraordinary ability to imitate it. Their kind of affectionate parody is really new, not just the old kind of ambiguity. But Vian doesn't even have the old ambiguity; his nonsense-wit is just a veneer over his sentimentality. When he goes behind the pages of glossy magazines to enter the world of their luxury ads, he is in Arcadia and he thinks the shepherds there are really sweet: Colin and Chick and Chloe and Alise, pretty androids with empty heads and smooth bodies covered with the nylon and cellophane which, alas, was as far as Vian's knowledge of high synthetic living could take him in 1946. Colin and Chloe's love affair is a shameless tear-jerker, though its terms are carefully bizarre. They are threatened by ugliness, you see. Chloe exquisitely wastes away because there's a water-lily growing inside her, draining her life away (this fatuity is below the level of the book as a whole, but it takes up a lot of its pages); expensive doctors simultaneously drain away Colin's entire trunkful of "double-zoons" (this *must* be more successful in French) and he has to go to work, which isn't at all agreeable. In the end the vision of his unappeasable grief drives his faithful and sensitive pet mouse to suicide. But even here ugly reality intrudes, for when the mouse puts its head inside an obliging cat's mouth,

> "Say," he said, "did you have shark this morning?"
>
> "Listen," said the cat, "if you don't like it you can always leave. The whole idea bores me, frankly. You can manage on your own."
>
> He seemed angry.
>
> "Don't get upset," said the mouse.

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I think this is pretty funny, so the novel ends well. I could tell you about the "pianocktail," a computer sort of thing that mixes very special cocktails when you program it with a Duke Ellington tune; I could tell you about Chick's fatal obsession of collecting all the editions and effects of a detestable writer named Jean-Sol Partre; and if it were worth the trouble I could report that Vian is much less amusing than a very long list of writers including Raymond Queneau, whom he occasionally imitates and who has called *Mood Indigo* "the greatest love novel of our time."

In an interview with the late W. K. Rose (printed in *Shenandoah,* Winter, 1968) Iris Murdoch had this to say:

> I feel that I want to drive my writing . . . back towards a much simpler kind of realism. I would like to be thought of as a realistic writer, in the sense in which good English novelists have been realists in the past. I want to talk about ordinary life and what things are like and people are like and so on, and to create characters who are real, free characters. Whether one could use experiment in the interests of this is something I have wondered about, but I am not sure. I don't at the moment see any big break with the way in which I have been writing.

I don't see any reason to believe that this is a put-on; and the slight inconsistency between the first sentence I have quoted and the last is probably one of those accidents which even the most scrupulous interviewer can't always avoid. But the statement as a whole is certainly disconcerting. I grant that the surface of a Murdoch novel is imitation-realistic, and that Miss Murdoch refers often to "ordinary people." But as an admirer of some of her past work I must earnestly ask whether she really believes that she has been describing what ordinary people and things are like, and that her characters are real and free. And I want to hope that she doesn't seriously entertain the thought that her talent lies (or can be "driven") in that direction. When Edith Wharton asked James " 'What was your idea in suspending the four principal characters in *The Golden Bowl* in the void? What sort of life did they lead when they were not watching each other and fencing with each other? Why have you stripped them of all the *human fringes* we necessarily trail after us through life?' " he answered "in a disturbed voice: 'My dear—I didn't know I had!' " I think Mrs. Wharton was right, but many people who admire James would, I think, believe instead that both Mrs. Wharton and James were right, since Mrs. Wharton was interested in one mode of realization of the human fringes and James in another. But Miss Murdoch has gone out of her way in the statement to Mr. Rose to deny that any such double-view is possible about her intentions.

Since *Bruno's Dream* was apparently written after the interview

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with Mr. Rose, it may fairly be taken to reflect Miss Murdoch's interest in "a simpler kind of realism" and may be examined from this perspective.

The novel reads along normally enough at the beginning. Bruno, the old, dying man who is at the center of the novel's structure, has just awakened, and the narrator records his musings as he waits for the maid to come to open the curtains after his afternoon nap. And in those musings we learn, in a mode normal to the realistic novel, many facts about Bruno and the people in his life; some of these facts aren't yet fully clear, some of them are completely unclear (what was it about his daughter Gwen's death that her husband found comical?) but we are used to this sort of mystery in realism. Here are some of the facts we are quite clear about: Bruno's severe father, who owned a printing concern, forced Bruno to enter that work, though he would rather have become a zoologist and has kept up an amateur-specialist's interest in spiders; his father left him an extensive stamp collection which he likes to look at from time to time, though he isn't seriously interested in philately; he hasn't yet decided to whom to leave this valuable property; the big romance of his life, with a *soi-disant* milliner named Maureen, came to an end when his wife Janie found out about it and briskly and efficiently forced a show-down; when his son Miles wanted to marry an Indian girl Bruno refused to give his permission and though he now regrets his action, he and his son have been estranged for many years. Now this sort of thing is ordinary enough by the standards of English realism, even the stamp-collection and the big books about spiders, though they are obviously loaded guns that are going to make a big bang later. And the rest of the novel goes on, in normal fashion, to amplify and develop and qualify this first glimpse of Bruno's ordinary life. And yet the whole thing isn't in the end what you would voluntarily call realism.

One reason for this is that the dramatic action that goes on around Bruno takes the familiar shape of an Iris Murdoch love-polyhedron (not a very interesting one, compared to *A Severed Head,* but that's beside the point). To this kind of writing something like Mrs. Wharton's objection to James's methods applies: though, unlike the people in *The Golden Bowl,* the characters in a Murdoch novel do have jobs and go to pubs and ride on buses, and though there's lots of London atmosphere, nevertheless, when it comes to the really serious business of Miss Murdoch's vision of life—falling in love—London is a very small town, since nobody falls in love with anybody further from his own family than his brother-in-law's wife or his brother-in-law's wife's sister. Since Bruno lives in the same book with so artificial a love-structure, the characterization can't easily continue to seem that of a very ordinary man. But even before Bruno gets implicated in Miss Murdoch's arbitrary scheme, I think Miss Murdoch is deluding herself if she thinks that she has achieved with this characterization any-

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thing close to what I understand as the realism of the English novelists of the past. She doesn't have the realistic imagination. There's nothing implausible about any of the details in Bruno's past that I have recounted, but realism doesn't mean lack of implausibility. It means the capacity to make the reader *actively* experience the illusion that all the details about a character—however implausible some of them may at first seem—really hang together and seem to have grown up together into an indissoluble human unity. I'm speaking, of course, about *great* realism, but I take it Miss Murdoch is speaking about that, too. And great realism is the hardest of fictional modes, just as it is so much the hardest to analyze that I can't do more than assert my failure to experience active belief in this old man.

But there are some failings in realism in this first glimpse of Bruno that aren't a matter of basic imagination, but of slovenliness about language. There has always been a lot of this in Miss Murdoch's work, and I fear that by now she has written too much too fast to be still capable of learning the elements of realistic fiction that can be learned. Bruno, for instance, is identified as a cultivated man but his voice is a very imprecise representation of the nature and degree of that cultivation. On spiders: "O spiders, spiders, spiders, those aristocrats of the creepy-crawly world, he had never ceased to love them, but he had somehow betrayed them from the start. He had never found an *Eresus niger,* though as a boy his certainty of finding one had seemed to come direct from God." On life as a dream: "It's all a dream, he thought, one goes through life in a dream, it's all so hard. Death refutes induction. There is no 'it' for it to be all about. There is just the dream, its texture, its essence . . . This dream stuff, this so intensely his dream stuff, would terminate at some moment and be gone." On guilt: "How selective guilt is, thought Bruno. It is the sins that link significantly with our life which we remember and regret. People whom we just knocked down in passing are soon lost to memory." A more skillful and energetic interest in language would have seen that "the creepy-crawly world" doesn't go well with "death refutes induction" and that neither prepares the reader for the outright impersonation of George Eliot in "It is the sins that link significantly with our life that we remember and regret." (Not very good George Eliot either.) I'm not ashamed of this detailed fault-finding because I take it for granted that Miss Murdoch has very high ambitions; and since some of her brilliant earlier work persuades me that she is right to have them, I am disturbed to hear her voicing what seems to me so wrong an idea of her talent. And I hope it doesn't seem too late to add that *Bruno's Dream* is full of intelligence, and full of interesting thinking, though not about ordinary people and ordinary things.

I got into a kind of rage of disappointment when the genius who

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wrote *The End of the Road* took up the fad for self-imprisonment in funny language. *The Sot-Weed Factor* and *Giles Goat-Boy* are unreadable, and I can swear to this because I read them through. So when John Barth's new collection of short pieces, *Lost in the Funhouse,* arrived my heart sank, and I left it on the shelf for a long time. But when I looked again, and found that the subtitle was "Fiction for Print, Tape, Live Voice," and heard the blurb-writer murmuring that these pieces "illustrate, in a deeper sense than McLuhan's, that, in fiction, the medium is the message," my spirits rose, since such abject subservience to current fashion as these details seemed to promise would exonerate me from any regret about the fate of a literary man so completely depraved. And now I've read *Lost in the Funhouse* with great pleasure and hardly know where to look. Because of my needless fears, I haven't given the book the attention it deserves, so I can only hazard first impressions. There may be a more significant relation than I have grasped between the folksy short stories about boyhood on the Eastern Shore and the deliberately bizarre excursions into the style of Borges, Beckett, Kafka and mock-epic, but I have a hunch that the structural pretensions are pure put-on. In any case, most of Barth's language has come back to genuine, and very funny, life. The spoofs of "fiction about fiction about fiction" manage, in a way I couldn't have predicted from the laborious imitations of the two previous novels, to be funny on this familiar subject and seriously interesting too, and both in new ways. The "Menelaiad" and the "Anonymiad" too surprise you by being able to come so freshly to such antique jokes. It's all in the voice, of course, which sounds free and self-delighting again, after the enslaved and strenuous pseudo-buoyancy and false-brio of *Sot-Weed* and *Goat-Boy*. I can't hope to understand what happened, particularly since some of the pieces were written during the *Goat-Boy* imprisonment. And if this happy parole brings Barth closer to Perelman than to Joyce or Beckett or *The End of the Road,* I have always been a fan of Perelman's.

***Notes on Contributors** (cont.)*

STEPHEN FARBER* is currently completing his M.A. in theater arts at UCLA, working under an American Film Institute Fellowship. He is Los Angeles Editor of *Film Quarterly* and a contributor to *Sight and Sound.*

HAYDEN CARRUTH's anthology of modern American poetry is scheduled for publication by Bantam in the Autumn.

ROGER SALE will be teaching in London this Spring.

Asterisk indicates a new contributor.

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ROBERT MARTIN ADAMS

Weimar Elegies

ONE OF BRECHT'S DARKEST, deepest laments is an apostrophe to Germany, written in 1933; it ends:

Oh Deutschland, bleiche Mutter!
Wie haben deine Söhne dich zugerichtet
Dass du unter den Völkern sitzest
Ein Gespött oder eine Furcht!

O Germany, pale mother!
How have your sons arrayed you
That you sit among the peoples
A thing of scorn and fear!

(tr. H. R. Hays)

Coming to terms with the German nation, its mystique, its history, its achievements, its shame, and its clouded future is a somber experience, too enormous to be confronted directly; three current volumes[1] offer different and perforce indirect approaches.

Hannah Arendt's *Men in Dark Times,* though it deals primarily with figures from recent German history, does not limit itself to them; there are memorial tributes to John XXIII, Randall Jarrell, and Isak Dinesen, who were not German, and a public eulogy of Lessing, who is not usually thought of as modern. All the essays in the book have appeared elsewhere, over a period of some dozen years; they are therefore unified only loosely, and by an elegiac mood rather than an argument. Miss Arendt, as everyone must know by now, is an eloquent voice of strict and discriminating praise; her theme here is the comportment of men under extreme conditions of solitude, terror, and doubt; and her concern is to assess the gain and loss of various strategies and compromises in men's dealings with a world they never made. It is grave, severe, and in places beautiful writing.

On the whole, purely literary figures lend fewest reverberations to Miss Arendt's theme of dark times. Hermann Broch, Isak Dinesen, and Randall Jarrell lived under ominous horizons, to be sure, but one can't feel that the pressure of public events dominated their lives, as it dominated, for example, Bertolt Brecht or Rosa Luxemburg. There the human personality was radically distorted, there one's capacity to understand its twistings and turnings is directly challenged.

[1] MEN IN DARK TIMES, by *Hannah Arendt.* Harcourt, Brace & World. $5.95. WEIMAR CULTURE, by *Peter Gay.* Harper & Row. $5.95. ILLUMINATIONS, by *Walter Benjamin.* Ed. and with an introduction by *Hannah Arendt.* Tr. by *Harry Zohn.* Harcourt, Brace & World, $5.95.

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The judgment that Miss Arendt brings to this politics of extreme desperation is essentially—and surprisingly—esthetic. What she admires in both Luxemburg and Brecht (when they exemplified it, as neither did unfailingly) is strict style. Brecht's refusal to exploit his own pathos almost balances his readiness to write verses adulatory of Stalin; Luxemburg's style of conspiracy is no less impressive than the consistency and (as Miss Arendt argues) the ultimate rightness of her views on war—views sustained against an opponent as formidable as Lenin himself. It is hard to think of any quality other than style that these figures share with Angelo Roncalli, that altogether unexpected Christian on the throne of St. Peter, who managed miraculously to combine personal humanity with the authentic severity that could write, "The Vicar of Christ knows what Christ wants from him." Not moral principles, far less moral pathos, but rather moral style determines her interest in a figure.

About this judgment in itself, there's not a great deal to say, style being a matter of personal taste, in the power of endurance as anywhere else. The hard humanism for which Miss Arendt speaks can't afford to have any part of its rent paid for it by theology or esthetic attitudes; it doesn't put much weight on the traditional "good conscience" or even on the generalized "life of reason." Between the polemical duplicity it endorses in Lessing and the sophistical equivocations it concedes to Brecht, public reason doesn't remain much more than a phantom. But an ideal it is, and surprisingly eighteenth-century; the ideal of an open space for conversation, persuasion, and relatedness leading (maybe) to self-definition. But this is a lucky optimum. In hard times one may be driven to all sorts of substitutes, expedients, and limitations, and Miss Arendt is sensitive to a kind of witnessing which need be no more dramatic or explicit than an act of friendship, without metaphysical motive or large social intent.

Of the twelve essays making up *Men in Hard Times,* four originally written in German have been translated more or less out of that language, though not all of them have made good their escape into English. Undeniably, the two soft spots in the collection are both translations. The first is an extended analysis of Hermann Broch's metaphysical stance—appropriate enough, no doubt, where it originally stood at the head of Broch's collected essays in the *Gesammelte Werke,* but quite out of key here, and, in the tradition of German metaphysical critiques, completely inaccessible to an unexercised reader. And the apologia for Walter Benjamin, generous as it is, doesn't carry full conviction, partly for reasons discussed below, partly because its dialect is tinged with translaterese. But, at her best, Miss Arendt controls to the last nuance what has become an almost obsolete art—the articulation of definitive moral and political judgment. Apart from some of Auden's memorial poems, there's not been much of what one can call serious writing in this vein lately. Though the level

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of Miss Arendt's elegies is uneven, their average elevation is impressive; and the very poise of her public speech goes a long way, in its grave, lapidary fervor, toward validating the values at which her dialectics point.

Weimar Culture, by Peter Gay, is a small, popular survey of an immense topic; it has a great many virtues, and one major defect, so glaring and provocative as to render a merely interesting book memorable like an aching corn in a tight shoe. By design, the book is a brief cultural and political history of the Weimar Republic, which endured from 1918 to 1933. As people who know his other work won't have to be reminded, Professor Gay is well equipped for the task of intellectual historian, having (in addition to formal qualifications of great solidity), the kind of prose style that causes a man to be mistrusted by his colleagues on the compelling ground that he pleases his readers. His writing here has particular pace and weight, because it is plain that though his treatment of the topic has been miniaturized for purposes of this book, massive substructures of reading and information sustain it.

A half-hearted and abortive fifteen-year experiment, undertaken by a conquered country under the pressures of civil war, insurrection, inflation, and depression, does not seem a likely seed-bed for a golden age of culture. Professor Gay shocks us from the first by the mere richness of his materials—by simply reciting the names of the painters. musicians, architects, sculptors, playwrights, novelists, poets, philosophers, social thinkers, artistic movements, psychoanalytic schools, scholars, historians, movie producers, and scientists who flourished under Weimar. (Apart from their inherent impressiveness, these names can't help reminding us what an enormous access of intellectual and cultural energy America received from the German emigrations of 1933 and afterwards—starting with Einstein and Thomas Mann, and radiating through all the fields of culture without any real exception.) Professor Gay's panorama of the age's cultural accomplishments doesn't resort to idealization or exaggeration; and in fact there's no need of either. In its luxuriance and concentration, the sort of flowering that took place in pre-Hitler Germany has had few parallels in modern history; we are still living, for better or worse, on the impetus it provided.

But Weimar culture flourished within the ramshackle framework provided by Weimar politics; and here there's much less occasion for idealization. Republican institutions never won much allegiance among the Germans, partly, no doubt, because they were defective and compromised institutions in themselves; but also because they were Republican. Professor Gay's narrative emphasizes the ferocity of reactionary opinion under the Republic—the monarchist army officers with a bent for assassination, the frankly lawless police, the anti-Semitic professors, the immense cartels and monopolies, the cult of irrationalism among men of letters and young people. He mentions

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also, though not so emphatically and with much less assurance, the savage infighting between social democrats and communists. In fact, he is not altogether candid about the position of the social democrats, to whom he tends to give generally good marks on the score of very dubious performances. They had already compromised themselves terribly by supporting an indefensible war against their own principles; they proceeded to compromise themselves still further by complicity with the murderous *Freikorps* in the assassination of their own leftist "comrades." If one's going to accept Gustav Noske as a well-meaning but tactless fellow, it's by no means clear that one isn't prepared to accept a good deal of social fascism right from the start—doubtless for the loftiest of purposes, the best of all possible ends (no end of blather available here). But who, then, is being invited to join in making the Republic?

As is now traditional, Professor Gay blames the Weimar Republicans for the coldness of their commitment, and the timidity of their performance. They should, he thinks, have purged the bureaucracy, liberalized the university curricular, broken up the cartels, taken vigorous action against the core of unrepentant militarists and sullen *fondeurs* who lay like cold snakes in the bosom of the Republic. Yet in the meanwhile, he accepts as merely "tactless" the use of these same militarists to murder the Spartacist leaders and alienate forever the only possible source of Republican fervor within the trade unions and the organizations of the left. The proper cure for all the ills of democracy, Professor Gay declares, is more and better democracy. So be it. But democracy for whom, with what sort of democrats? If democracy and rationalism were to prevail among the Germans, they needed (as they need anywhere else) a base of action, a center on which to cohere. Without a place to stand, Archimedes could never move the world; without some convinced Republicans, there's no making a Republic. Where to look for them, right, left, or center? Professor Gay may be correct (though for reasons he never indicates) in implying they couldn't be found and shouldn't have been sought on the left; he's certainly naïve, at best, in implying they could have been conjured out of thin air.

His failure to root his recommendations in really or potentially existing forces is especially irksome, because Professor Gay is so eloquent and convincing about the obstacles confronting the Republic. These were not merely immediate political circumstances; a long tradition of semi-mystical irrationality, woven into the texture of the nation's cultural achievement and into the structure of the language itself, made all footing treacherous. To convert Germans into rational Republicans, it was evidently necessary to disengage them from some part of what they defined, as freely as these things are ever defined, as their German-hood.

Mr. Gay, whose heart is with the Enlightenment, is no more daunted

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by these intangibles than by practical considerations of political support and he wades into the German past with both guns blazing. He blasts Heidegger, disparages the cults of Rilke, Kleist, and Hölderlin, would clearly cauterize Wagner if he could, dismisses the work of Spengler as barracks brutality, and probes an inner softness in the work of Hugo von Hofmannsthal as inviting and complementing the Spenglerian ethos. He doesn't fall into the vulgar error of blaming Nietzsche for Hitler, and steers clear—probably wisely—of the immense problem of assessing the influence of Marx; but his diagnosis of the ills of the Weimar Republic is already so overwhelming that, instead of wondering why the patient died, we are left wondering how and why he was ever born in the first place. In his later chapters, particularly, he shows how the self-conscious "youth" movements of the twenties, beginning as a search for emancipation and spiritual wholeness, degenerated into restless, directionless, intransigent gangs, which were easily vacuum-cleanered into the *Hitlerjugend,* or (since "youth" leaders age faster than anyone but girl swimmers) into the SS. All well and good to say that the cure for democracy's ills is more democracy—i.e., more democrats, better Settembrinis. But what to build on when words like "nature" and "spiritual wholeness," activities like folk-singing and mountain-climbing, become masks and façades of totalitarianism? The traumatic flaw of Professor Gay's book is the open inadequacy of even his hindsight remedies in the face of his diagnoses.

There's much in the story to meditate, but this is no place to moralize it at length. Suffice it to say that if romanticism is indeed, as Hulme called it, "split religion," the degradation of public speech and responsible discourse is bound to ferment all those second- and third-growth romanticisms which we find on our hands into bad faith. And that virulent infection contaminates even those who offer quick cures and universal nostrums against it. Mr. Gay's fervid tract will do most good if followed by prompt application of cold compresses from Miss Arendt's medicine closet. There's even the chance that if Mr. Gay's diagnosis went a little deeper morally, it wouldn't have to extend so wide historically—into inquisitions upon Rilke and George, Hölderlin and Heidegger, Kleist, and Novalis, which gave to the doctrine of political democracy a little unwelcome flavor of thumbscrew, boot, and strappado.

Walter Benjamin's *Illuminations* constitute a document from Weimar itself. For the first time in English (of a sort), they put before us a selection (however curious) of the work of a German-Jewish man of letters whose career coincided almost exactly with that of the Republic. Benjamin was the author of two books of literary criticism, two books of short essays, and a pseudonymous collection of letters; not one of these achievements, however is represented in *Illuminations.* Rather, the book has been compiled almost entirely from

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Benjamin's periodical journalism, as collected originally in a two-volume *Schriften* which appeared in 1955 (fifteen years after his wretched suicide at the French border town of Port-Bou) under the editorship of his old friend and colleague T. W. Adorno.

Under the circumstances, it is not easy to feel that the present volume revives Walter Benjamin very successfully as a vital presence. Not a word of his five published books appears here; everything we do have is based on inaccurate typescripts or illegible manuscripts which, the editor takes pains to assure us (*Illuminations,* p. 267), "unquestionably contain numerous errors." The translation, so far as I've been able to check it, manages to uncase Benjamin's thought only partially and with great difficulty from its often turgid and imprecise German. Even the choice of essays is strange, ranging from a gay trifle on the pleasures of book collecting to a piece of tortured and badly-dated Marxist dialectic on the moving pictures—these two, particularly, seem scarcely to be the work of the same man. Climatically, Miss Arendt, in the Introduction (which does double duty as a chapter on Benjamin in *Men in Dark Times*) pays no attention to the volume she is introducing, preferring to concentrate on other aspects of Benjamin's life and thought—as a result of which, anomalies abound. Miss Arendt speaks of Benjamin as an aphorist, but there are hardly any aphorisms in *Illuminations* (the curious reader will find most of them in *Einbahnstrasse,* toward the end of Volume I of the *Schriften*). She dwells at length on his passion for quotations, and says he once contemplated a work entirely composed of them; but no particular evidence of any such inordinate interest appears before us. There was a time when one used to feel that if Kafka hadn't been obviously beyond the range of Max Brod's inventive powers, he might easily have been an imaginary friend of that intrusive editor-arranger-biographer-commentator; Walter Benjamin has moments of looking like a figment of T. W. Adorno.

As a matter of fact, though the unchronological arrangement of the present volume discourages one from seeing it (the arrangement isn't topical either, it seems to be altogether random), there may be reason to distinguish a real and an unreal Walter Benjamin. His first work was done on Goethe's *Elective Affinities* and Baudelaire; the real sympathies of his intellectual life were with Kafka and Proust. But fate had thrown him into the harsh landscape of the Weimar Republic; during the summer of 1924 he was converted to Marxism by a Lithuanian lady whom he met on the unproletarian island of Capri; and the magazines in which he published during the thirties, as they determined the friends with whom he associated, encouraged this bent. As a Marxist, Benjamin was bound to prove pretty much a fish out of water, and not only because he was a gentle, improvident nineteenth-century esthete, who couldn't (or wouldn't) earn a living, couldn't break free of his well-to-do bourgeois family, couldn't unravel

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the tangled fate of being both Jewish and German. The deeper problem seems to have been that his culture, his training, his habits of mind, were patently irrelevant to the realities of the proletarian movement. Hence he was drawn two contrary ways, both unfortunate: to debase, on the one hand, the quality of his perceptions, and on the other hand to spin out cobweb relationships with contemporary history, under the elastic guise of dialectical thinking.

In the present volume, he appears to best advantage as a commentator on Kafka and Baudelaire; yet he does not develop, with regard to either author, a distinctive critical point of view, or even a controlling thesis; he works primarily with limited passages and to aperçus of significant detail. Walter Benjamin was not, evidently, a vulgar reader; even the relatively slight piece on Proust which is included here illustrates his bent for taking a text with the sort of aggressive humility that results in highly civilized commentary. But his approach couldn't conceivably lead to a definitive study of anything. Thus, it is hardly surprising that his critical work has suffered an eclipse; it was written for, and in the mood of, that leisured world of cultured general readers and all-day café conversationalists which hardly exists any more, and was dying even in the thirties. What took its place—almost before our eyes, in the present volume—was a kind of portentous ideological expertise which I don't think it's any kindness to the author to revive, in this day and age, or attempt to popularize. Miss Arendt, in her thoroughly honorable efforts to reconcile Benjamin the social thinker and Benjamin the esthete, talks about him, more ornately than is her wont, as a deep-sea diver, intent on bringing up fragments and coralized relics from the lost past. That, however, is to accept him as a collector of curious fragments; his "Marxism," so far as it was real enough to be criticized one way or another, must surely have intended an intellectual schema of some sort. From the viewpoint of 1968, it couldn't be deader.

As a Good European, Walter Benjamin represents what most of us are likely to feel is the highest potential of the modern German; but the price of the option was high for him, and there's no reason to think it any lower nowadays. For, after all, those endearing characteristics of the unwordly man of letters—*flânerie,* bibliomania, dilettantism, verbal sensitivity itself—whatever their value to the onlooker, are for the participant himself symptoms of a deep disease that isn't charming at all. Culture and history, as even we Americans are starting to learn, make jealous bedfellows; what's given to one is likely to be subtracted, if only surreptitiously, from the other. History is doubtless the ugly one; but, if only for the sake of his partner, he must be given his due. Alternately delicate children of life and jack-booted goose-steppers, the Germans seem no closer than ever to the assurance of knowing themselves; no wonder the nations watch them, in scorn and fear, to be sure, but also with a sort of holy dread.

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ROGER SALE

The Men from America[1]

JOHN QUINN, LIKE EDWARD GARNETT and Robert McAlmon and J. B. Pinker among many others, is known to everyone and no one. These names are familiar to those who read about the great writers and artists of the beginning of the century: Quinn was a patron and a collector, Garnett an editor, McAlmon a very minor writer, Pinker an agent who dealt with everyone honestly. They are mentioned often in biographies, and Joyce and Yeats and Pound and Lawrence and Wyndham Lewis wrote letters to them. But they are unknown, because we seem to treat those whose importance we are unaware of as data, not as people.

B. L. Reid opens his *The Man from New York* acknowledging all this, as though he were going to make us see, at least and at last, one man differently:

> My interest in John Quinn was first aroused by the way in which his name, or his picture, kept cropping up in situations of some cultural significance, his function there only vaguely accounted for. Especially in reading modern literature, I found myself meeting again and again, for no visible good reason, the name or image of Quinn. When he was identified at all, it was with some hurried and uninstructive tag as "John Quinn (1870-1924), American lawyer and patron of the arts." I was baffled and curious. Why did he show up in so many different places? one wondered; why was he not home practicing law? Why would W. B. Yeats pose so complacently and companionably with this man standing at his shoulder? Why would Yeats write so many letters, such witty, serious, and circumstantial letters, to an American lawyer, addressing him apparently as a cultural equal? What is John Quinn doing posed in a stiff white wing collar in a Paris studio garden with Ezra Pound, Ford Madox Ford, and James Joyce? (Do they know he is there? Did they invite him in?) What was such a man doing in possession of the manuscript of *Ulysses* or *The Waste Land*? Was he the same man who owned Brancusi's *Mlle. Pogany,* Matisse's *Blue Nude,* Picasso's *Three Musicians,* and Rousseau's *Sleeping Beauty*?

A biography could hardly have a better beginning. Here is a blessed combination of curiosity and stylishness that seems just right for such an enterprise. But something went wrong, for after Reid discovered he had much more material on his hands than he could

[1] THE MAN FROM NEW YORK: JOHN QUINN AND HIS FRIENDS, by *B. L. Reid.* Oxford University Press. $12.50.

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have imagined existing before he found it, he let his material overwhelm him so that his curiosity was satisfied with a glut and his stylishness was reduced to commentary and never served as a controlling spirit. As a result Reid has acheived the last thing he wanted: "John Quinn (1870-1924), American lawyer and patron of the arts" writ large and over again a thousand times.

One class of reader, though, will have no cause to complain about the 660 pages of this unshaped and ungainly text—the dippers and the index-users who want to find out something new about someone, almost anyone: the Yeats family, Synge, Lady Gregory, AE, Augustus John, Arthur Symons, John Sloan, Walt Kuhn, Conrad, Joyce, Eliot, Wyndham Lewis, Jacob Epstein, Picasso, Rouault, Derain, the Duchamps brothers, Roger Casement. Quinn knew these people, many of them well, and even those he did not know he invested in, with time, money, and trust. He bought their paintings and their manuscripts long after he had run out of space decently to house or hang his purchases, he listened to their gossip and their mini-lectures on art and life, he arranged to have their books published, he proofread their galleys, he bought copies of their works to send to friends, thereby making money for the author and introducing him to a fine and special audience. An energetic, quirky, passionate man himself, he understood and admired these same qualities in others—he fought with everyone, except George Russell, with whom no one could ever quarrel, and Pound, who was too much of a fellow publicist for antagonism to matter—and so brought the characteristic selves of others into action. It is for those in search of new tidbits about the high and the mighty, then, that Reid's book is written.

A second class of reader, made up of those who want to read a biography from beginning to end, will find that Reid's assiduous martialing of hundreds of details does them less than justice. There is a Quinn here in these three hundred thousand words, but he emerges as much the result of accident or whim as design. Reid concentrates on Quinn's activities as a patron and collector because that is what is most interesting about him, but there is much here about other parts of Quinn's life, and the whole never really is clear. For instance, Quinn was an immensely active and energetic lawyer for banks and financiers, and though we hear over and over about how busy he was, and are told occasionally of the outline of a case or of the addition or the firing of a partner, at no point does Reid ask what Quinn's life in the law was like; he does not even quote much from Quinn's briefs. He made lots of money, he was scrupulous but not always, he was political but not very—we are given glimpses here and there, but nothing more. Early in the book Reid calls Quinn a "Tammany stalwart" and then near the end he quotes a long passage from Quinn that vehemently denies he was ever a member of Tammany Hall. Quinn's failing memory? deceit?

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overstatement? Reid does not even imply there is a problem. For another instance, Quinn was a bachelor who had a number of long and short term mistresses; of the last and most important woman in his life, Jeanne Robert Foster, Reid says "she would doubtless have met Quinn long since had she not avoided him because of his reputation as an eater of females." Nothing Reid says up to this point implies the reputation was not well earned, so when Quinn and Mrs. Foster do meet and become close, the reader is allowed silently to imagine their relationship. Then, at the very end when, after Quinn dies, Reid says: "Bitterly comforting Mrs. Foster, as well as multiplying her frustration and grief, was the knowledge that she and Quinn had loved each other, but that there could never be, in life or death, a marriage, a possession, a public or private union." Where Reid gets his "there could never be" he is not saying; he does not even act as though he has rebuked his reader for imagining what he led him to imagine.

Reid does much better with the Quinn he rightly is most interested in, though it is hard not to be disappointed because his comments on Quinn's taste and public manner are both rare and quite good. Quinn started out adoring Meredith's novels, coveting the paintings of Puvis de Chavannes, and lavishly supporting Augustus John. Fifteen years later he was seeing the characteristic qualities and importance of Pound, Joyce, and Eliot, he was buying Brancusi, Picasso, Matisse, Rouault, and Rousseau when few in Europe and none in America considered such purchases the act of a rational man. Reid comments on these facts, and documents them lavishly, but seldom does more. What happened to Quinn between 1905 and 1920 to change him from Caspar Goodwood to a collector without peer for intelligent investment in the new? Something, and there are five hundred pages here devoted to those years, but no answer is forthcoming. With some biographers—Harry T. Moore, for instance, or Gerard Jean-Aubry—one is grateful that they stay out of the way as much as they do, given what happens when they do not. Reid is not in this class, or does not have to be:

> His was a powerful, elegant, often easy presence. He could be gracefully at home in any company. On the other hand it was not a constant presence, and perhaps not a natural one. It was too conscious, too fragile, too vulnerable to its company, to circumstances, and to small passions from within. It was not the presence of an achieved serenity of spirit. Quinn had the kind of egotism that is half confident, half frightened, never the modesty of deep self-trust. Quinn knew gentlemen and ladies: Judge Keogh, Walter Pach, Arthur B. Davies, Padraic Colum, Mrs. Foster, John Butler Yeats, Lady Gregory, George Russell, Standish O'Grady, Ezra Pound (three-quarters of him), Rouault, Brancusi, Braque, Roché, Gwen

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> John. All of them tolerated him, all of them valued him in some way, most of them admired him, a few of them loved him. By and large what they valued in him was a genuine if inconstant charm, a generally trustworthy good will, an extraordinary efficient energy—a likeableness and a usefulness that generally successfully obscured certain traits at the heart of the man that needed a good deal of forgiving: vanity, bullying, rant, vulgarity of sentiment.

This is good, and coming as it does after a few hundred pages of nothing like it, it seems even better, remarkable. But it is awful to have to wait for it until page 511, worse still to recognize that though these comments are all supported amply they do not in truth grow out of the book and do not at all shape Reid's chronicling of events. Nothing grows out of this book—passages like these are not conclusions but intelligent and occasional reflections.

It may seem pettish or petty to complain this way. After all, I know much more about John Quinn that I ever dreamed of knowing before, and my tolerance for idle gossip is great enough so that I was not always bored as I went through this mountain of unedited detail. Reading this book is a harmless, low pleasure, and my complaint is the same one that can be made about many massive recent biographies—Gordon Haight's *George Eliot* is the most obvious other example because it was published by the same firm, at the same time, even at the same price as *The Man from New York*—they turn their readers into intellectual pornographers of a sort, and this cannot be considered a good thing. Near the beginning of Reid's book are the words "William Butler Yeats," and shortly thereafter are the words "Lady Gregory"; each set of words is repeated many hundreds of times later on. What we are supposed to do whenever these or any other words that name famous people appear is just what we do with pornography: on cue, we supply our own material, images, energy. We are not asked to see Yeats in Quinn's way, or Reid's way, and are not to inquire about what these ways are or were. It is assumed we have our own way of seeing Yeats, and our way, no matter what it is, is plenty good enough for Reid. We are meant to supply our own Pound, our own Conrad, our own Joyce—for the most part we are even supposed to have our own John Quinn. Thus Reid can be intelligent, diligent, cultivated, and yet tell us nothing. Biography must be fact and compilation, a good deal of it must have the interest of gossip, and it must be shaped in part by the kind and quality of the material available to the biographer. But when that biographer in effect goes dumb in the presence of his material, he cannot be serving his subject well. Reid started looking for material on Quinn and found, presumably to his delight, enough to start a small library. It is understandable that he accepted it all as a kind of treasure in itself. But it was terribly

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wasteful of him to have stopped there, to have treated it as a dragon does his hoard. Here is Sheldon Cheney's description of Quinn's "collection":

> . . . some of the treasures were piled apparently without rhyme or reason against the walls, under the beds and in unexpected nooks and corners. . . . There was little of art to be seen immediately as one entered the dim rooms; rather an impression of a theatrical prop room, with strange-shaped objects peeping out from under dustcaps—the bulgy Brancusi sculptures, no doubt—and only here or there a painting hung openly on a wall.

It is just like Reid's biography—shapeless, energetic, wonderful, wasteful, not really there. If Quinn is, as Reid says, a distinctively American type, then so is Reid himself, the same type.

Gordon Ray's Thackeray, Ernest Samuels' Henry Adams, Moore's Lawrence, Edgar Johnson's Dickens, the dreadful MLA editions of American authors: the incontrovertible fact is that the major way scholarship is produced and judged in this country is by the pound.

About Quinn and his friends, at the very least, it may be later than we think. We all do have our Yeats and our Lady Gregory to supply when a writer like Reid asks us to; we may even be foolish enough to be flattered at the presumption that we know these people. But we cannot assume this for much longer unless we ask of ourselves and of each other that we compile less and look more, that we slow down, that we treat Quinn and Yeats and Lady Gregory as they deserve, as people, and as people we admire, that we do this each time we look.

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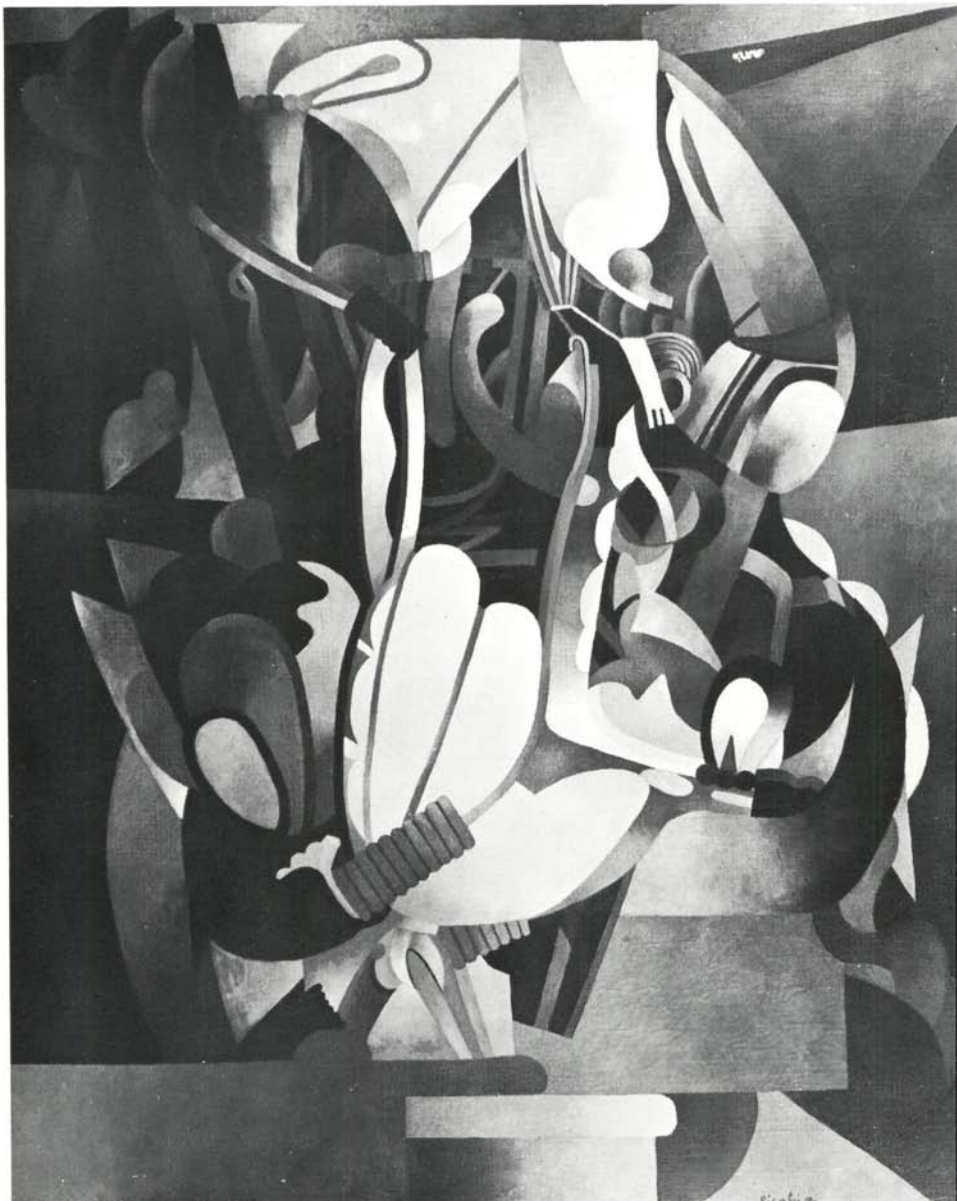

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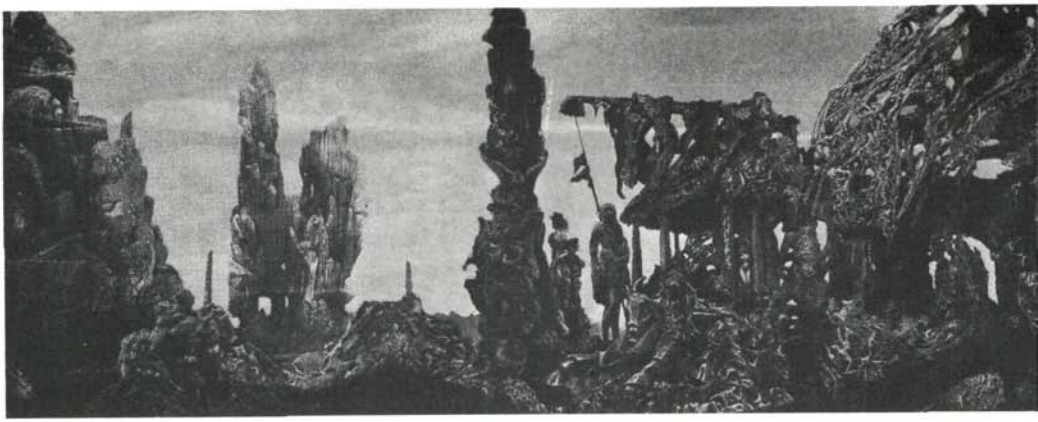

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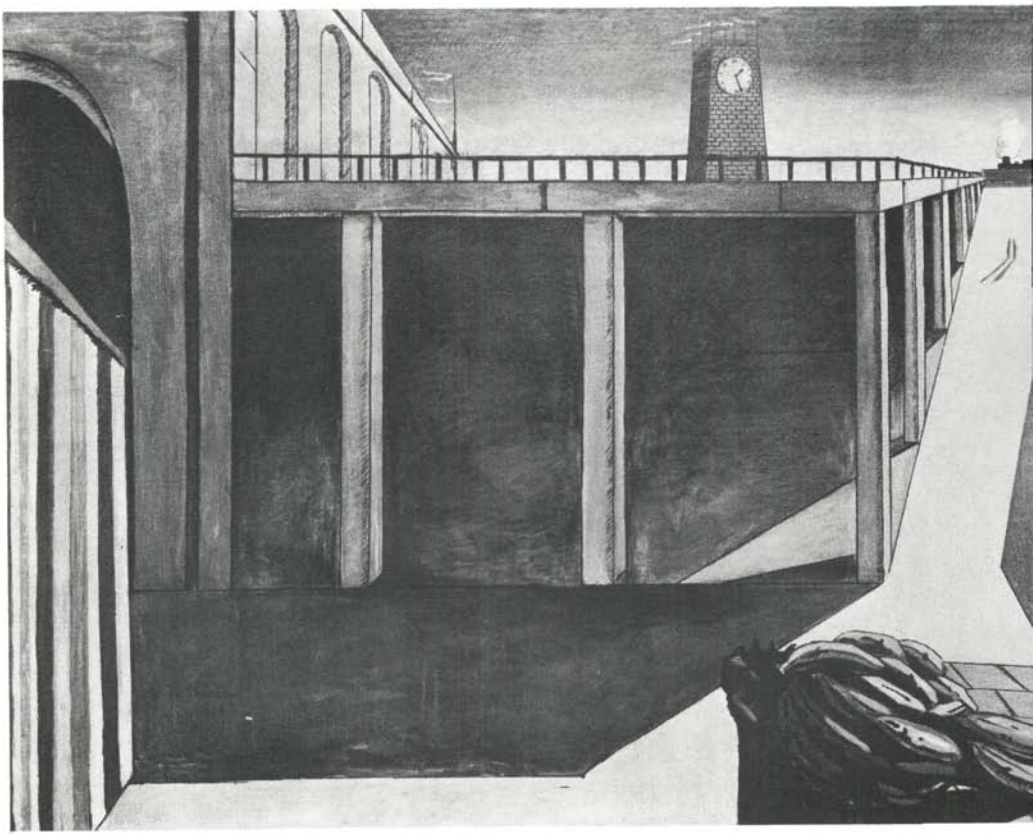

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